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A GILDED VANITY

R I C H A R D D E H A N

*"Even the wedding ring," she said,
"That on this my hand he placed—
Hath its holiness erased—
Given by such a groom as he
To a bride as light as I,—
'Tis no hallowed thing, nor chaste,
But a golden vanity!"*
"The Bride's Ballad."

A GILDED VANITY

By RICHARD DEHAN

Author of

"The Dop Doctor," "Between Two Thieves,"

"The Man of Iron," etc.

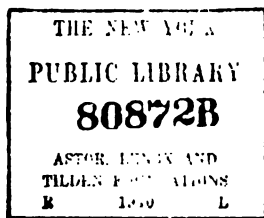


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A GILDED VANITY

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A GILDED VANITY

CHAPTER I .

HILARY PRICKS FORTH

I SUGGEST, Diana," said Hilary Warr, addressing his hostess from the opposite end of the Westwood Hall breakfast table, "that in future you do not let Pope Dollimore buy your horses for you."

"It is a return of confidence," said Lady Baintree, as she dispensed buttered muffin to her collies, and cream to her sleek Angora cats. Outside upon the frosty lawn this February morning, her other pensioners, the starlings and thrushes, waited their accustomed benevolence of crumbs from a lady whose love of bestowal amounted to idiosyncrasy.

"I know you choose Dollimore's wives," said Warr, daringly, "and he stocks your stables. But, good fellow as he is, he is probably the worst judge of a hunter in Europe. And this mare—your latest acquisition—sent down yesterday from Tattersall's—is spavined, and roars."

"You are sure?"

"Positive. Besides—"

"Spare me the 'besides'."

"I shall have to give Pope a talking-to. Such a succession of crocks to carry you to covert, Diana! . . . You'll be the joke of the county."

Lady Baintree's handsome black eyebrows were puckered in doubt for a second, then she turned off the urn decidedly.

"I shall not. Let it be known that I have given up riding to hounds, and intend only to motor to Meets in future. Pope did not choose my car!"

"Luckily, no!" said Warr, who was himself responsible for this purchase. Then the butler brought in the contents of the morning post-bag. Hilary Warr was the recipient of a plump envelope with the Foreign Office seal, and another bearing a stamped flap-device of a less stately character.

"Downing Street and Savile Row," he said in answer to his cousin's glance of inquiry, for Diana still played the part of vigilant elder to the man of thirty years. "A line from Lord Folbury himself about that Persian appointment."

"About the Consulship. As if you were wanted to bury yourself alive amongst people who drink hot mutton-fat and wear Astrakhan hats, with the temperature at a hundred and ninety."

"The interment," said Warr, "is not likely to come off. There is a more promising man altogether; an abler kind of fellow, and more suited to the post, in the official eye. Dorwen—Granger Dorwen—whom you used to know. At Eton with me. Came home to Warr Court for the holidays, and fell in love with you, Diana, and Pope Dollimore tried to fight him—an awful scene of carnage. You came upon us when we

were pumping on the ensanguined Popy in the stable-yard."

Lady Baintree's eyebrows crumpled, and she bit her lips as if repressing some emotion. A flimsy bundle of foreign paper fluttered in her hand. Hilary knew the small, neat penmanship, and nodded to it, saying cheerfully:

"You have heard from Pope! How is he—how are he and Charlotte getting on?"

Lady Baintree handed him the letter with an upward waving motion of the chin and eyes, which signified, he knew, that if Pope Dollimore and his newly-made bride were not getting on as well as might have been expected, no two human creatures of opposing sex might ever combine in wedded harmony. Charlotte and Pope, Pope and Charlotte, had been carefully selected with a view to each other's happiness. Under the circumstances, they could hardly be so lost to every sense of gratitude as to disagree. But Diana was not satisfied with Pope's letter. There was something like a wail echoing between the lines.

"Read the third sheet. All the beginning is mere balderdash—messages from people he has met in Paris and Rome, *on dits* devoid of interest, talk about the coming General Election and Bagley-Chitwell—"

"I thought, you know," said Hilary, "that Pope re-married in the interests of Bagley-Chitwell as particularly as in his own?"

"Of course. What is a Member of Parliament without a wife?"

"This Member of Parliament had already had one of your providing."

"Hilary, if you are going to cast that viper in my teeth—"

Diana's fine eyes brimmed, and Warr hastened to avert the deluge. Pope's third sheet, neatly written, and numbered with official exactitude, was before him. The first had been indited by a bridegroom at Rome. This was dated from Cannes by a married man of a fortnight's standing; and notwithstanding the formality of the handwriting, there was a wildness, a distraction, apparent in the composition of the sentences which gave ground for apprehension.

"*You ask me,*" wrote Pope, "*whether I am not perfectly happy? You invite me to lay my hand upon my heart—*"

"Never!" interjected Lady Baintree; "the man must be wandering."

Hilary read on:

"To lay my hand upon my heart and declare solemnly that I have at last attained to the summit of earthly bliss. My dear Diana—my dear friend, what man lives who dare do this? When we meet you will probably tell me I am the most enviable of mortals. . . . And I shall take your word for it, Diana. Relying as I do upon the soundness of your judgment, and the correctness of your views, I shall believe you!"

The writer went on to say that Cannes as a winter resort seemed to him overrated. When there was warmth it was a clammy warmth, provocative of rheumatism. When there were bracing airs, these were of a bleakness and poignancy particularly well adapted for the aggravation of bronchial tendencies. The meteorological index, at the moment of penning, must certainly have indicated severe depression.

"Something is wrong," said Lady Baintree, meeting Hilary's glance. "I did not expect that Pope would be glowing, or poetic; I did not look for a—"

"An epithalamium?"

"That sounds as though it might be the word!" Diana added. "I need hardly remind you that when I was a girl in pinafores—and you were an urchin in sailor collars—there was no talk of the Higher Education for women. Our governesses were not young ladies with college degrees—they were meek impositions or benevolent frauds, and did not even speak correctly the language they professed to teach. Our French and German we got from our maids and nurses. But this is not to the point. Hilary, there is something unsettled about Pope, and I must know the reason!"

By a special grace Hilary repressed the answer that lay at his tongue's tip. He would have liked immensely to say:

"The reason is—Charlotte!" and then bolt, if the bolting could have been continued indefinitely. Memory projected Charlotte upon his mental field of vision: a tall, somewhat angular young woman, too self-satisfied to be affectionate, too ordinary to be entertaining, with a large hand, a large foot, a large loud voice, and large widely open grey eyes with a glassy stare in them. Not the mistress whose glance should turn a cart-horse into Pegasus—not the bride whose possession should inspire a dithyramb. Nor to be sure was Pope the ideal bridegroom. But the stout little man was lovable, somehow, in his artlessly manifested desire for everybody's sympathy, and belief in everybody's goodness: and Hilary picturing him as gradu-

ally congealing, stiffening to the consistency of New Zealand mutton in Charlotte's refrigerating atmosphere, said unguardedly:

"A man might as well be married to the Jungfrau!"

"I did not hear you," said his cousin, "you spoke so indistinctly. That is not usual with you; perhaps the beard you have brought home from your Neilgherry expedition is accountable. That ornament, a tanned skin and a considerable amount of information concerning a mountaineering tribe of cow-worshippers, about whose country, religion, language, costume—or the want of it—nobody is in the least degree anxious to hear—would appear to be the only visible results of a very considerable outlay."

"Together with this!"

She put up her glasses to inspect the document he held up before her.

"That?"

"It is an intimation from the Honorary Secretary of the Imperial Ethnological Society, that in recognition of what the Committee are good enough to call my valuable contribution to scientific literature, they have voted me—"

"One moment. . . . You read a paper before the Society a month ago. That is the valuable contribution to which the Secretary refers?"

"Diana, don't be crushing!"

"My dear cousin, I only ask for enlightenment. It is true that you lent your manuscript to me, and that I couldn't understand a word of it. Do I gather that the Committee of the Ethnological Society, more alive to the value of your work than a weak and frivolous woman, have awarded you, as the author of a Mono-

pole or a Monocle—No!—neither one nor the other.”

“To be coldly correct, Diana, I have been guilty of a Monograph on the Marriage Customs of the Aboriginal Todas.”

“Todas or Froggas leave me equally cold. Not so the committee, who I trust have awarded you a sufficient sum of money to recoup you for your outlay in the cause of science?”

“Not exactly. But I have their Gold Medal—”

“Ah! And that is worth—?”

“Some five sovereigns, I daresay, Diana.”

“And your expedition cost you three hundred pounds.”

“A little more, perhaps.”

“A little more than half your yearly income.” . . .

Hillary stiffened a little. She saw that she had gone too far. Upon certain points of independence the Warrs were touchy.

“The point is, that it is my income, and not begged or borrowed from anybody else.”

“Obstinate!” She sighed, and rose, and came and kissed him on the forehead, where the crisp light brown hairs began to crinkle, above the level of the sun-tan. “When you might have as much of mine as you wanted.”

“But I don’t want it. Spend your spare thousands on the folk who do.”

“Quixote. You compel me to waste it on unprofitable objects.”

“Do you call marriageable young ladies unprofitable objects? Are you not the Bona Dea of dowerless virgins? a Matrimonial Missionary to Society at large?”

A light he knew well began to gleam in her eye. There were moments when, inspired by her master-passion, she was almost fateful.

"Hilary,"—there was a note of entreaty in her voice—"when are you going to let me marry you?—I mean—let me find you a nice wife?"

He said, with an inward chuckle: "You know I'm a petrified bachelor. Continue to respect me, can't you, as the only male creature who has been able to maintain celibacy in spite of your urgings towards conjugality? And, you have found Pope a nice wife. Can't that content you?"

She shot a rapid glance of thanksgiving towards the panelled ceiling.

"It should. After that first unfortunate venture. You were in India, when those events transpired. You had no personal experience of Jane."

"Jane was your discovery. You wrote me an eight-page letter, categorically setting forth her perfections, you dwelt with insistence on your conviction that in her Pope was destined to find the ideal mate."

"I did say I thought she would do for Pope."

"She certainly got within an appreciable distance of that result. He had eyes like green railway lamps when he met me at Southampton, after the *decree nisi* was made absolute—and his waistcoat hung in folds piteous to see."

"We need not speak of that dreadful time," said Lady Baintree, controlling a tendency to shudder. She added: "I believe I suffered more than Pope. And he is now happily settled, thank Heaven! Charlotte is no giddy creature of torrid temperament—"

"But a creature of Alpine remoteness and inaccessi-

bility. Monte Rosa in petticoats—as described in your letters to me. What should you say,” Warr queried, “if, the monograph upon the Aboriginal Todas being off my mind, I were to run South for a few weeks, and look up your latest pair of honeymooners?”

“It would relieve me beyond expression,” said Lady Baintree incautiously, “to receive the very latest news of Pope and Charlotte from so reliable a source. Ring at once, and tell one of the men to put your things together.”

“I’ll see to the packing myself,” said Hilary Warr. He got up and moved with his long, light stride towards the door, mechanically feeling for his cigar-case as he went. “One can get to the bachelors’ wing by the garden way,” he went on, “unless I am thinking of somebody else’s house?”

“Your memory,” said Lady Baintree, “has not deceived you. A wrought-iron staircase, Italian design, with gilded scroll-work—leads down, balcony by balcony, to the azalea shrubbery on our sunny side. A fad of my poor dear’s.” (She alluded to Sir Charles Baintree, who had resigned existence and the rôle of husband to Diana while yet the coat in which he had led her to the altar was of fashionable cut.) “‘Expensive! oh! undoubtedly. But so convenient for the bachelors,’ he used to say. You have your old room at the end? Yes! I forgot how empty the house was, and that it might strike you as unsociable.”

Warr admitted that, even after the cantons of the Neilgherries, the civilised desolation of a series of corridors of which he was the sole inhabitant did strike rather chilly. But he went away to stuff a well-worn Gladstone bag with a few necessities, whistling, and

in excellent spirits. Before the dog-cart came round, he paid a second visit to Pope Dollimore's purchase. The mare, as Bayliss bitterly observed, had made the most of her time in kicking herself dead lame. She sawed her head-rope up and down till the rings rattled, and looked upon all comers with a malevolent eye. It occurred to Hilary Warr for the twentieth time that if his cousin would choose her own hacks and automobiles she would have less time to employ in the forcible adjustment of other folks' careers. And his mental eye turned towards Cannes, and picturing Pope in process of refrigeration, with lips frost-bitten in the desperate effort to snatch a conjugal kiss, he laughed aloud at the humour of his own thought, as children and maniacs, and men and women who are much injured to solitude, often do.

CHAPTER II

POPE IN HARNESS

THE hotel which the honeymooners had selected as their temporary abode was the kind of place where everybody else goes under the same circumstances. It possessed a vast white façade, to which many green Venetian blinds, Majolica window-boxes, and striped awnings, lent a frivolous air. There were orange-trees in tubs, and hedges of flowering syringa; one caught ultramarine and violet peeps of sea between clumps of grey-green foliage; cacti, palms, and aloes inspiring reminiscences of the East; roses reminding one of nothing but the Riviera; the polyglot composite population that may be found there and everywhere else.

The sun shone gallantly for one who had left an English February behind him, though the breeze had a bite of frost. The fancy came to Hilary that Charlotte had iced the atmosphere. He saw her approaching, clad in bridal dove-colour, edged with fur of chinchilla. She looked handsomer than he could have believed possible. She wore an astonishing hat of Maria Jackson's (Diana had given it and the gown, Hilary was sure; she never scrupled to pour forth gold when the decking of a victim for the altar was in question)—though she had not paid Pope's tailor for the immaculately-cut garments in which he was paraded. The rotund, dapper, once fussy little man was sadly altered. Even in the

reign of Jane, now vanished into space with the sum for which her jointure had been compounded—even when he groaned beneath that yoke, he had not presented so crushed an appearance, nor exhibited such an absolute eclipse of individuality. He was now the mere tail to Charlotte's kite; the tassel of bank-notes that should steady her in many an aerial flight—prevised in the heady twitch of her nostrils, the cold ambition of her grey eyes, the obstinate jut of her under-jaw. And this was the woman who had had views as to the amelioration of this, that, and the other, who had decried extravagance in dress, who had spelt Society with a little "s," whom Diana had chosen out of a host of aspirants as the ideal helpmeet. Heaven and earth! her very voice was changed as she greeted Hilary.

"You! of all people," Charlotte cried in a high-toned nasal key, and offered Warr the latest handshake in grey suède. Once, doubtless urged on by Diana, she had set her cap at him, deplored the restraints of civilisation, hinted that her ideal of earthly bliss lay in a nomadic existence, spent by the side of some beloved wanderer amidst scenes as wildly sylvan as those which surrounded the first pair of wedded lovers; quoting Mrs. Livingstone and Lady Burton and other authorities to demonstrate the practicability of the rôle of explorer's bride. And Hilary, while seeing the hook as clearly as the often-angled-for trout, had nibbled a little at the end of the lure without the slightest intention of being caught. Charlotte's tone and expression gave him now to understand that these piscatory passages were buried in oblivion.

"You will breakfast with us?" she said, forestalling

the invitation that was upon her husband's tongue. "A mid-day breakfast after the foreign fashion, with *hors d'œuvres* and fruit and claret." Hilary wished she would not talk of things being foreign-fashioned! "We got into the way of it in Paris and Rome."

Then she hailed a passing head-waiter in the French language, or what would have been the French language in the opinion of Charlotte's family, by whom her powers as a linguist were held in traditional repute. I do not think I mentioned that Charlotte was the daughter of the Vicar of Westwood-Witton, a living in the gift of the lady of Westwood Hall, and had first attracted the attention of Lady Baintree by the spirited manner in which she rode upon the whirlwind and directed the storm of parish affairs. And, indeed, it is only natural to conjecture that such a young woman, who can quell a mothers' meeting at a glance, and settle single-handed the disputes of infuriated coal and blanket claimants, should be the wife of wives for a public man. Here now was Charlotte bullying the waiter—who spoke English admirably—in imperfect tenses, with regard to the corner table in the *salle à manger*, which had already been appropriated by another party of three, a gentleman and two ladies, both of whom were young; one so immature as to merit the designation of a child. These bowed distantly to Charlotte and smilingly to Pope, who spoke of them as "the Colquhouns," but volunteered no further information. It must be understood that Charlotte had been profuse of inquiries as to the health of dear Lady Baintree—dearest Lady Baintree! Pope had said in rather a hollow tone, "I trust Diana is well?"

"As full of health, spirits, and energy as usual,"

returned Warr. It seemed to him that Pope's jaw dropped a little as though he felt himself a living testimony to that superabundant energy.

"Dear thing. We shall see her in town in the spring," effused Charlotte.

"She contemplates Chesterfield Gardens in April."

"And we Cadogan Square."

"Till then—"

"We shall be busy at Bagley. People expect so much from the lords of the manor," Charlotte said.

"I thought the house was let."

"I made Pope buy back the lease. He has got over his dislike to the house now." Charlotte darted her lord and master a glance which was meant to be arch, if not tender, across the coffee-tray, and Hilary remembered that Jane had burnt her boats, and fought her last battle at Bagley before the county rose in its strength and said, "This woman must be cut!" He glanced at Pope, whose smile was sicklied over with a pale cast of something not quite comprehensible, and at the same time the Moorish curtains that depended beneath the double entrance arch of the *salle* being pulled aside, the florid countenance of the little bridegroom immediately offered to observation a curious combination of colour. A green complexion in conjunction with a yellow top-knot may be becoming and appropriate to a macaw, but a human being presenting these peculiarities provokes comment. Charlotte, however, did not remark Pope's manifestation of perturbation; she was looking at the lady who had just entered.

"What a stylish woman! Quite the best-dressed I have seen for ages." She appealed to Hilary, who was

conscious of a laxity of the muscles of the jaw which rendered speech difficult. Pope's mouth was open, his arms hung helplessly at his sides; he leaned back in his chair and blinked a little, feebly, between dying-gold-fish gasps. For the new-comer was Jane. Jane in the highest possible spirits, Jane at the zenith of her showy beauty, Jane dyed, waved, dressed, jewelled—too jewelled—and accompanied by the last man upon earth of whom her late husband might wish to be reminded. A more awful *contretemps* could hardly have been devised by the Enemy.

"Parisienne, I am sure," Charlotte babbled on, complacently, "or the best type of American who can boast old family and high breeding, and who gets her gowns from Worth. Now she is speaking to the people who so rudely took our corner table. I wonder who she is?"

Neither of the men replied. Both of them were looking at Jane—it may be mentioned that Charlotte had never seen her predecessor,—as she rustled across the polished parquet, followed by her ostentatiously beaming possessor, to bestow a morning salutation upon her acquaintances. Half-way to the table her eye lighted upon Pope, coolly scanned his perturbed features, took a comprehensive if swift survey of Charlotte's large countenance, then reverted to Warr. She bowed to Warr, flaunting for the moment a small corner of her flag of defiance, while her Lothario, behind her, blackened and scowled. Then she turned to the two English sisters, who with a middle-aged military father, a slightly decayed specimen of the *beau sabreur*, were breakfasting at Charlotte's coveted corner table.

"Why, she knows you!" Charlotte exclaimed, with eager, slightly offended curiosity; then as Pope remained dumb and Warr's sunburned cheeks were conscious of a tingling sensation of warmth, she tittered and tossed her large head, and said with a laborious loftiness and reserve:

"I *see*! I beg your pardon! But *indeed* she did not appear to belong to *that* class of—"

At which Pope bounded in his chair and collapsed with a gurgle, and Warr, stepping to the rescue, proposed liqueur and cigarettes in the garden.

Thither the two men repaired alone,—Charlotte, with a happy inspiration, possibly snatched from Jane's coiffure—finding it necessary that her hair should be again dressed.

They had a little table under the shade of a pinkish-stemmed eucalyptus, and as the sunshine danced upon the gilt-green decanter and the tiny glasses the quick attendant set before them, Pope—who had interchanged no signal of intelligence with Warr up to the moment, broke out with:

"Deplorably unfortunate! Awful—most awful!"

"Luckily Charlotte was quite ignorant," Warr began.

"I trust," Pope returned, "I trust in Providence that she may remain so! But both, my dear Warr! My first and my second together under one roof. My second admires my first's toilette. My first—" he broke off. "It sounds like one of the acrostics newspapers offer to be guessed correctly for a prize." He rolled his round china-blue eyes over the rim of his little glass of Benedictine. "You cannot imagine," he went on, "the

kind of sensation that came over me. I felt like—I do not know what I felt like, my dear Warr."

"Men are more sensitive than women," Warr remarked. "Our skins are tougher, but our feelings are less pachydermatous."

"You mean that Jane took it coolly," Pope said. "Coolness has always been her weapon, under all circumstances and in every conceivable situation. As for Bigg-Warsley—"

"He looked uncommonly sick," said Warr, recalling the visage that Lothario had been unable to wring into a grin.

"Do you think," Pope hesitated, and swallowed, "that it is incumbent on me—the encounter having taken place on foreign soil—to send him a friend?"

"With a challenge? Absolutely no! Your present position puts such a course out of the question."

"I will not assume, my dear Warr," Pope said, "that your assurance does not give me some amount of satisfaction. You knew me at Eton, where I was very far from being a fighting boy—"

"I remember your hitting Dorwen in the eye because he stole Diana's photograph," said Warr, with the old warming towards the old, kindly, boyish days.

"At Warr Court in the holidays," Pope Dollimore returned. "You should remember too, my dear Warr, that he thrashed me dreadfully."

Hilary recalled the pumping episode, and Diana's appearance on the scene.

"Diana! She—she had said only the evening before that she hated and scorned a boy who could not use his fists on provocation. And so—I took the first that occurred," Pope exclaimed.

"Diana has been the axis on which your whole life has spun."

"She has such strength of purpose," the little man said. "Such astonishing vitality. Energy that positively dizzies one. I declare to you," he put his hand plaintively to his head, "that sometimes she makes everything go round."

"That is through trying so incessantly to make everything go square," said Warr.

"It pleases her," said Pope stoutly, "and it does not—" he could not candidly say Lady Baintree's amiable weakness was invariably productive of unalloyed good to others, "it does not always do harm. You said that she was well, and busy?"

"Planning married happiness," said Warr wickedly, "for another of her *protégées*; Euphemia Bullerby, I believe; I mean, I *know*."

"Miss Bullerby is engaged?"

"To the Westwood-Witton doctor, that Scotchman, Lockaby."

"I should have said, had you asked me, that two people more unsuited to each other did not exist."

"Perhaps Diana holds the opinion that it is better to begin with a little disparity."

Pope winced, and Warr blamed his own faculty for unconsidered speech. But Diana's victim said, after a pause:

"To revert to the unpleasant encounter of this morning—I may say, Warr, that I consider your accidental arrival—in connection with that—as Providential."

Warr's eyes, well-opened, handsome, and of darker hue than his light brown hair, and short, crisp beard, opened in surprise. What did old Popy want him to

do? Explain the situation to Charlotte the bride—act as ambassador conveying suggestions of departure to Jane the Hardy? But Pope was already launched upon the explanation.

"You observed the three people who were breakfasting at an adjoining table?"

"The corner table. A grizzled ex-officer—of British Cavalry, I should say, with two daughters."

"Precisely. Jane—*she* spoke to them." . . .

"Well?"

"They are known to me."

"I saw that you were acquainted."

"A Scottish family. Their name is Colquhoun. They are very far from rich, but are highly connected, and the eldest girl, Elizabeth, a charming young creature, is just upon the point of making her *début* in Society. I have enlisted, I trust, Diana's good offices in her behalf. The letter in which I mentioned her was written from Nice, the place, in fact, where I came across the family, reviving an agreeable acquaintance after a lapse of years."

Warr wondered to what this preamble was going to lead.

"Cannes is full of fashionable people—people to whom Elizabeth Colquhoun will be presented by and by—people whose good graces it is imperative that she should gain," Pope went on, his round florid cheeks growing pinker, and his round china-blue eyes more saucer-shaped as his excitement increased. "And I need hardly say to a man of the world, like yourself, it is necessary that Miss Colquhoun should not place herself, at the outset of her social career, in an invidious position. Now, I do not suppose that, all

things considered, and putting personal prejudice aside, that Jane—that the lady who arrived at the hotel last night in company with Mr. Bigg-Warsley can be considered a fitting companion for a young girl.”

Warr began to see a glimmer.

“It is plain therefore that Captain Colquhoun or Miss Elizabeth herself must be given a hint upon the subject,” Pope went on, “and it is equally clear that the warning must not emanate from me. And I think, my dear Warr, that if you would convey to father and daughter together, or father and daughter singly, the necessary caution—”

“They will, singly or together, think me uncommonly impertinent,” said Warr.

“They ought to thank you warmly for having saved an inexperienced young girl from a compromising situation,” returned Pope. “Or if they do not, Diana will. Remember she has promised to extend her hand to Miss Colquhoun. And as it happens—here she comes!”

“Who?” Warr cried, “Diana? Nonsense!”

But Pope, jumping to his short legs with unexpected nimbleness, was already retreating towards the hotel, while along a garden alley, paved with green-mossed tiles and chequered with dancing lights and flying shadows, under the blossoming, perfume-shedding boughs of mimosa and almond, came Elizabeth Colquhoun.

CHAPTER III

HILARY FULFILS A MISSION

YOU will recall that Pope, stricken with sudden panic, perhaps apprehensive of the arrival of Jane upon the scene, bounced out of his chair and sped towards the hotel, between bristling rows of aloes which appeared to the fugitive to be holding up prickly green hands in scandalised deprecation of so shocking an encounter. Before he reached the refuge of his bridal suite upon the balconied second-floor Memory jogged his elbow. He had forgotten to introduce Hilary Warr to Miss Colquhoun.

He glanced back irresolute. Warr stood as he had been left. Elizabeth, in her white serge gown and big black picture-hat, her crocus-tinted sunshade poised upon her shoulder, was close upon him; Pope would have retraced his steps but that a feminine cachinnation, a laugh he had, for many jarring reasons, cause to remember, struck upon his ear. It was echoed by another as familiar, if less unpleasantly so. He looked into the vestibule, the threshold of which was about an inch below the level of his eyebrows, as he stood at the bottom of the broad, low flight of steps that led up to the hotel. It was incredible effrontery, but absolute fact. . . . The Lady of the Cantrips was there, exchanging bird-of-passage-like civilities with Charlotte, his bride, while Mr. Bigg-Warsley stood by, from ear to ear one gleam of costly ivory and gold, from head

to foot an advertisement of the tailor's art in the outward making of a gentleman. Pope Dollimore was a little man, fussy and lacking in dignity of presence, but upon this occasion righteous wrath made up for physical deficiency. He gained the top step and strode forward, and at the moment when Charlotte, with a less wintry smile than usual, exclaimed, "Here is my husband!" Jane and her fellow-sinner vanished like bursting bubbles.

Meanwhile Hilary Warr stood looking at Miss Colquhoun. His mission of warning seemed to him, as the girl drew nearer, a less vividly unpleasant thing. He wished Pope had not gone off without performing the ceremony of introduction. Warr was an easy-going Bohemian; he had lived much upon the Continent and abroad, and professed scorn of the *convenances* of Society. Had Miss Colquhoun been a Frenchwoman, the preliminaries towards establishing an acquaintance would have been easily carried out. She would have given him her guide-book or her bouquet to hold, and listened with patience to whatever he had to say, so long as he said it agreeably. But the female Briton, even when young and fair and daintily garbed, though devoid of the sandy hair and the plaid frock, the long teeth and the blue spectacles attributed to her by Continental humorists, can yet encompass herself about—even when sea-sick upon an ocean steamship—with a prickly hedge of reserve, which appals the timid of the male sex and daunts the daring. Warr found himself nervous, and smiled at the unaccustomed sensation. Then he became conscious that the smile might not be taken in good part, and instantly assumed a countenance of preternatural

solemnity. Then he said hastily, as the white figure forged abreast of him:

"I—I beg your pardon, Miss Colquhoun!" and blushed under his lifted hat like any schoolboy.

"Yes, I am Miss Colquhoun," the young lady he addressed replied in a cool, sweet voice, which matched her face indescribably well. She brought her eyes down from chasing a pair of yellow butterflies in and out of the thicket of mimosa-blossoms and turned them on his face. They were grey in colour, or hazel, or blue, and heavily bordered with long, straight, brown lashes. And there was a powdering of freckles underneath them, and on the short straight nose and on the curve of the upper lip the sun had dropped a kiss or two. There was something about the way her throat rose out of its encircling band of moss-green velvet that reminded Warr of a ripe fruit. One slender hand supported her sunshade, which had a rough brown stick with pink almond blossoms bursting out of the knob; the other dangled a pair of tan-coloured gloves. And he noted all this in an instant, as one does, sometimes. Do people who are destined to bring a great deal of grief or a corresponding amount of joy into the lives of each other experience any peculiar thrill at meeting? The question has been put so many times, and never satisfactorily answered.

CHAPTER IV

ELIZABETH

I AM Miss Colquhoun," Elizabeth repeated, and looked at the tall, lightly-built, broad-shouldered man in the grey tweed suit, with a calm indifference of outward regard. She rather liked his beard, she thought; it was like a Vandyke portrait; and if she were a man she would have chosen a tie of that opaline grey silk, and knotted it in just such a way under the well-fitting linen collar; and she, too, would have abstained from all jewellery, except perhaps a sardonyx seal ring set in heavy reddish gold, worn upon the little finger of the right hand—if she had been a man. . . .

"Perhaps you may have heard," said Hilary Warr lamely, as he realised with annoyance, "of Lady Baintree—Lady Diana Baintree, of Westwood Hall, Suffolk." He explained as methodically as an envelope.

"Oh, yes," said Miss Colquhoun, with a soaring inflection in the accent that sounded vaguely Scotch, and altogether charming. "I have heard Mr. Dolli-more speak of Lady Baintree, and I saw you at breakfast with him this morning." This she added as an afterthought, so indifferently that it would have pleased Hilary better not to have been seen at all. The minutes were speeding. Hilary did not feel as though much progress had been made.

"I am a cousin of Lady Baintree's," he said almost bashfully. "My name is Warr. She, my cousin, hopes to see you soon."

"I am very glad," said Miss Colquhoun; "I have heard she is so charming . . . to everybody."

"Particularly to people who are charming themselves," responded Hilary. "I believe she has promised to take you under her wing by and by, and that is one of the principal excuses I may claim in venturing to introduce myself." He looked at Elizabeth rather imploringly. If she became tired or disgusted, and went off, the thing would have all to be done over again, and he was as yet miles away from his warning.

"Mr. Dollimore is very kind," said Elizabeth, with a pretty little artificial air of gratitude. "He wrote to Lady Baintree after meeting us—father and me, and Midge—my sister I mean—in Rome. He said Lady Baintree was a Providence to girls about to come out; and as my coming out has been delayed—papa's health obliges him to live upon the Continent, and he cannot bear to be left alone—he would—I mean Mr. Dollimore would interest Lady Baintree in my behalf. He has been most kind, though I cannot help imagining that I have offended him in some way. He looked at me so oddly this morning at breakfast, and just now," she cried, growing emphatic over her grievance, "I saw him standing here with you, and when he spied me coming he ran away. What can be the reason?"

She lifted her grey eyes to Warr's face, and Warr, for whom the Book of the Wiles of Women lay unsealed—Warr, who had been loved a little, much, passionately, by women, and had loved not at all in return; who had walked all his life free from those clanking

amatory fetters which hamper the footsteps of other men; Warr, who was the despair of his cousin Diana in that respect of not falling in love with eligible girls, fell in love with Elizabeth Colquhoun, and began to con over, with how many pangs, present and to come, the old, old alphabet of the heart. . . .

"What can be the reason?" cried puzzled Elizabeth, oblivious of the catastrophe.

"Of Dollimore's flight? Shall I tell you? He was frightened."

"Frightened! Why?"

"I will ask you a question before I answer yours. A lady spoke to you this morning when you were at breakfast; she came to your table accompanied by a gentleman. May I be pardoned for asking you whether that lady is well known to you?"

"She is a travelling acquaintance of some weeks' standing," Miss Colquhoun answered slowly. "We met her first at Nice, at Babagani's Hotel, and father liked both her and her husband."

"And—do *you* like them?"

Elizabeth knitted her fine brows slightly; the tone of cross-examination was not to her taste.

"I think she's a little noisy, and he—dresses too well; otherwise—" She broke off, and cried, growing pink: "Was this the reason that Mr. Dollimore—? He has seen me speaking to her, and now, I recollect. . . . Does he know Mrs. Bigg-Warsley?"

"Mr. Dollimore has not the honour of Mrs. Bigg-Warsley's acquaintance. But the lady who accompanies Mr. Bigg-Warsley upon his travels was once fairly well known to my friend. She was, in fact—

his wife! His wife until the law relieved him of the obligation of calling her by that name."

"Oh!" Elizabeth ejaculated, her sweet eyes growing round with consternation, her cheeks red as any poppy that ever grew amongst English corn.

"You were aware that there had been a divorce suit?"

"I—I had heard it. But of course I had never seen—*her*! And she spoke to me—quite close to where he was sitting—she looked him straight in the face. How dared she? Wretch!" the girl cried, "she must be the most shameless creature in the world."

"Dollimore does not call her so. He is willing to live and let live, and, as you know, he has married again." Hilary's mind reverted to the Alpine Charlotte for a chilly instant. "But—the lady who was once his wife has not. And Dollimore has deputed me to tell you, or your father, that in view of the late Mrs. Dollimore's present position, she is hardly the most advantageous acquaintance for a young lady just about to make her *début* in Society," he continued, with a faint pang of pity for Jane the erring. To be condemned by Elizabeth Colquhoun—cast out from the paradise wherein an angel walked, wearing a black straw hat plumed with lilac, and a white serge gown and carrying a vanity-bag of old German silver filigree; what a fate for the sinner! But the voice of Jane herself broke in upon his thought. Radiantly attired, beautifully waved, clanking with jewelled chains, rustling, smiling, diffusing perfume and small talk, the unfortunate woman sailed towards Elizabeth, on the arm of the grinning Bigg-Warsley. With words of gayest greeting on her lips, she paused; for Elizabeth,

ordinarily of medium height, now towered. She had become a giantess, about whose Titanic brows the storm-clouds rolled, and the lightning hurled its lances of insupportable brightness. In simpler language, Jane was cut; and it was as though the whole world of women rejected her, so mercilessly was the deed done. Then, without waiting to triumph in her victory, Elizabeth turned, and with a hurried bow to Warr, hastened in the direction of the hotel.

"Women *are* hard to one another," thought Warr, who beheld the victim writhing, and would have tempered the necessary feminine justice with a little weak masculine mercy. But the thought that lingered longest was, how handsome Elizabeth looked as she dealt the blow. We perceive that his case was hopeless.

CHAPTER V

AU QUATRIÈME

THE Colquhouns were not wealthy; their apartments were upon the fourth floor, looking to wooded heights, without the seaboard view. The bedroom shared by the sisters was a chamber of restricted proportions, but large enough to contain two curtained beds, a toilette table, the inevitable English travelling-bath and some trunks. One of these was open, the top tray revealed an accumulation of faded ribbons, uncurled feathers, dejected-looking artificial blossoms, and many straw and muslin shapes, naked and ashamed. The younger Miss Colquhoun sat upon the floor close by, engaged in amateur millinery. She held up the unfinished hat for admiration as Elizabeth entered, and looked up, tossing back the amber-tinted waves of heavy silken hair that did not in the least impede the clearness of her vision. It was a pretty trick, and caused beauty-loving observers to look at the child with indulgent smiles. And Midge kept it up in private—or it had become second nature.

“To be quite—quite in the fashion,” she cried, “your roses and things ought to stick up straight—just as though they were growing out of your head. The question is how to make them do it.” She surveyed an umbrageous mass of impossible horticultural specimens with interest; she glanced to Elizabeth for sympathy, and instantly noted her agitation. “You’ve been out

in the sun, and it has caught your face, and you're looking like a boiled lobster, dear," she said in her sweet little gushing voice, the voice of a thrush in the midst of a prickly holly bush. "It's simply awful. Now I *never* burn."

She got up and shook her slim little person into perfect order in an instant, and glided like a dancing, yellow-headed sunbeam towards the dressing-glass, as Elizabeth with a stifled groan threw herself upon her bed, and buried her scorching face in the cool pillow. From that place of concealment she uttered in muffled tones:

"It is not the sun. Midge, you must never speak to Mrs. Bigg-Warsley again."

"What on earth has she done? Only yesterday you thought her so awfully nice," shrilled Midge. "And she asked me into her room this morning, and gave me all these flowers and ribbons, and six cut-steel buttons and a silver buckle set with olivines."

"The things must all be sent back, or burned. It will be better to burn them. There is no good in asking questions. Mrs. Bigg-Warsley is a—*an* awful woman. I have cut her, and you must never seem to see her again, no matter how often you may meet."

"What has she done?"

"Oh! things!"

"The Bible tells us," said Midge, settling her amber waves with a little approving air, "that we are not to judge others."

"She has been already judged."

"You don't mean," cried Midge, with a sparkling face of excited interest, "that she has been in the newspapers?"

"You have hit the nail on the head," returned Elizabeth seriously, looking out of her pillows for an instant.

"Darling! do tell me what for." Midge bounded into the air and came down again, like an indiarubber ball of many colours, on the bed beside her sister. "Is she a thingomaniac, and drinks, or the other kind of maniac with pockets in her underskirt, who attends sales and snaps up things at the Stores?"

"Never mind!"

"Perhaps she played cards and cheated and got caught, so there was a Police Case?"

"Perhaps."

"Oh, how unkind you are! I don't believe there is anything so awful after all. Perhaps she's not a lady but only an actress—a *bad* actress."

"She is certainly playing a part that does not belong to her. Oh! if I had only known before I accepted her civilities to you at Nice."

"I'm glad you didn't. Poor little girls like me can't afford to lose opportunities of making friends. And she gave me all those nice things, and when father's remittances were late in coming . . . What on earth is the matter?"

For Elizabeth had started up, dishevelled and agonised. "Did he? I never guessed! Oh! how could he! the money—how much did he borrow?"

"Fifteen pounds," answered Midge rather sulkily.

"It shall be paid at once! Ring for the waiter. Oh! they may be leaving the hotel." Elizabeth darted to her dress-basket, unlocked it, threw back the lid, and dived in, rummaging wildly. She emerged with a purse, and emptied the contents on the bed. There

were two five-pound notes, six twenty-franc billets, with a stray piece of gold and some silver. She huddled the required sum into an envelope, directed and sealed it on the writing-table, Midge standing by with a blank face and a quivering lip of infantile misery.

"Ring!" commanded the usually placid Elizabeth, looking up from her packet.

"But," whimpered Midge, "that is the whole of your quarter's allowance!"

"I know. Now give me that buckle, please."

"Take it! Oh! I never was treated so! And you—you were going to buy me a new frock for evening wear."

"I was," admitted Elizabeth ruefully, "but it cannot be bought now." She went to the bell and touched the knob. Midge dissolved in tears.

"You're a hard-hearted thing," she wailed, "and you don't care whether your poor little sister goes about in rags or not. And I had told the pupils at Miss Pinnock's all about that new frock, and now I shall have to g-go back without it. As though it wasn't bad enough to be a parlour-boarder with no home to go to for the holidays, and who is obliged to renew family ties, once in two years, at a foreign hotel!"

Elizabeth despatched the packet by the close-cropped male attendant who answered her summons. Then she went to Midge, after an instant's hesitation, and began to offer all the comfort she had to bestow. To kisses and soft words the sufferer was impervious, but upon the promise of a trinket—Elizabeth's filigree vanity-bag—in lieu of the vanished new dress, she allowed her tears to be dried.

"Who was it told you all about Mrs. Bigg-Warsley?"

she asked suddenly, as Elizabeth brushed out the long bright waves of hair in preparation for dinner. And Elizabeth, taken unawares, answered:

"The tall man who breakfasted with Mr. and Mrs. Dollimore to-day. Mr. Hilary Warr, a cousin of Lady Baintree's."

Midge clenched her little white fists and cried:

"Then I hate Mr. Hilary Warr! But for him I should have had my new frock and my buckle. No, you may talk as you like, Elizabeth, but nothing will induce me to forgive that man! I hope something will happen to pay him out. Is he rich?"

"I believe not," said Elizabeth, fastening her dinner frock.

"Then I hope he will lose all the money he has got! Is he young?"

"About thirty, perhaps a little more."

"Good-looking?"

"Some people would say—very." Elizabeth, looking in the hand-mirror, settled the fine tendrils of copper-brown hair that played about the nape of her white neck, and smiled a little.

"Then you can pay him out for me without any trouble. Make him fall in love with you, and snub him awfully. Do, like a darling!"

"But if he will not fall in love with me, what am I to do?" Elizabeth asked gaily.

"Oh, he will be sure to. People are always falling in love with you. There was the French master when you were at Miss Pinnock's, and the curate of St. Ethelwold's, and a lot more."

"Nonsense!"

"I hope you will not be so foolish, though, as to

marry anybody who is poor," said Midge prettily, throwing back her waves, "because a girl who has got your advantages owes it to her family to make a splendid match. Besides, I shall be coming out soon, and it is your duty, Miss Pinnock says, to see that I do it decently. Didn't you promise mother when I was a baby, just before she died, that you never would allow me to be neglected?"

Elizabeth had a vision of the pretty, pale little mother lifting the white cashmere shawl from a downy, yellow head. She nodded without speaking, and the electric alarm rang out. Voices sounded in the passages; the hotel guests were thronging down to the *table d'hôte*.

"Don't let us be late," said Midge, dancing to the door, "or all the *hors d'œuvres* will be gone. I am so fond of caviare, and crying does give one such an appetite."

They went down to the *salle*. Jane—crushed and humiliated Jane, let us suppose—did not appear. She went away with her lover by the afternoon train, in fact, and so out of the story. Pope Dollimore and Charlotte neighboured the Colquhouns at the long, glittering table. Opposite Elizabeth sat Mr. Hilary Warr.

CHAPTER VI

CONCERNING THE COLQUHOUNS

THE Colquhouns came of an excellent Scotch family, as Pope Dollimore had already informed Hilary Warr. Lord Rederdall, the head of the house, an elderly, widowed peer with a patriarchal quiverful of sons and daughters, had paid his younger brother's debts upon his own accession to the title, and was not disposed to be more liberal. Indeed, despite the large annual rental the Rederdall grouse moors and salmon rivers commanded, their lordly proprietor found himself a poor man. He had a coal-mine on his estate, he was fond of saying, and was too straitened in means to work it.

"If ever I strike oil," Captain Colquhoun declared, "I'll float a Company and start workings on that piece of moorside."

"If ever you strike oil," the Peer returned, "you will do nothing of the sort; but provide respectably for those two girls of yours. How you can lie down upon your bed at night knowing that if you die they will have—unless some decent fellow with a little money marries one of them—to go to the workhouse—"

"Elizabeth has her mother's money," the Captain put in.

"Seventeen hundred pounds in the Funds—the interest of which you spend, or I am much mistaken."

"You wound me, Poer; you wound and wrong me

besides." Captain Colquhoun's fine eyes seemed ready to brim over. He was still a personable man, and as he walked beside his brother seemed to overshadow the lean figure beside him, as a stout and sturdy oak might a withered thornbush. "Elizabeth's money is entirely under her own control. If now and then she buys her loving old father a box of cigars—"

"Loving old father smokes Havanas of a deuced expensive brand," snarled the Peer.

"Or helps a little towards Midge's schooling—"

"Midge! Why in the name of all that is unreasonable do you distort the girl's baptismal name after such a monstrous fashion?"

"Her mother's name was Marietta," the Captain explained with meekness, "and we called the baby Molly at first, until somebody thought Midge sounded more caressing. Then after the loss of my dear one—" he drew out and flourished a silk pocket-handkerchief—"her being called Marietta was quite out of the question. I could not have borne—"

But Lord Rederdall (who loathed perfumery), with a countenance screwed to the highest tension of disgust, was signalling speechlessly that the handkerchief should be returned to the Captain's pocket.

"I beg your pardon!" the latter said apologetically. "I forgot you did not like scent."

"Scent, do you call it! I'd as soon be to windward of a polecat. Look here, Grantly, Maria wants the red room, as one of her doctors is coming up from Edinburgh to-morrow. Not that she wants doctors; but to be humoured keeps her quiet, and we've not another guest-chamber in decent repair, so—"

"So her old uncle must turn out, eh?"

"You're fifteen years younger than I am. I don't understand this affectation of calling yourself old. Look here, Grantly, if you're in your usual state of impecuniosity—"

"I am," the Captain said, "at present awaiting a remittance from my daughter Elizabeth, who is staying at Brighton, with her sister Mid—Marietta. Marietta is residing as parlour-boarder with Miss Pinnock (Magnall House, Cedar Grove, is the address)—a most estimable person—"

"Don't squeeze Elizabeth! Look here—I'll stand you thirty, and ten of that you must give your girl from me with my kind love. I like Elizabeth; nobody would ever dream she was your daughter. Here, two tens and two fives. Don't squeeze my hand! I'm a mass of rheumatism. Walk on before me—I've a keeper's lodge to call at—and get your traps together, and the brake shall be ready to drive you to Cauld-gates Station after lunch."

"Always was a sordid, screwing fellow," reflected the Captain, as with a jovial flourish of his stick he strode on, "and the idiosyncrasy grows more settled as he ages. He *does* age, though his failure brings me no nearer the title, with all those long-legged nephews of mine, confound 'em, waiting to grab it when he drops."

This may be taken as a fair sample of the interviews that took place between the brothers. Is it necessary to mention that Elizabeth received her Uncle Poer's kind love in due course, but not his ten pounds? In a bland, easy-going spirit of forgetfulness Captain Colquhoun ignored the obligation charged upon his brother's sparing gift, as he ignored, upon the sudden departure of Jane and Mr. Bigg-Warsley from the

Cannes hotel,—the fact of the other pecuniary obligation incurred at Nice, when those ever-failing remittances had not arrived from England, which debt, as we know, poor Elizabeth's meagre little quarterly dividend had gone to discharge.

CHAPTER VII

GLAMOUR

THERE was an after-dinner promenade. The stars that night were the whitest, the biggest, and the brightest that Elizabeth had ever seen. Warr was her companion; they had dropped behind the others. Pope's squat little figure, the tall angular outlines of his bride, Captain Colquhoun, with Midge hanging on his arm, had vanished into the many-voiced darkness, resonant with the clanging valse-music that poured out of the gaily illuminated pagoda, where the Viennese band were mustered with their leaflets of Strauss, and Weber, and Greig, before them, under the *bâton* of their conductor, a kind of washed brigand in evening dress, who wore a solitaire in his shirt as large as an electric lamp, and whose moustaches were twisted over his ears, Sikh fashion. That idea about the stars occurred to Warr, who had travelled in all quarters of the globe, and viewed those luminaries under all possible conditions. He laughed at the sweet madness that was brewing in his blood, but he did not seek to stay fermentation by flight. Seen under the purple sky-dome with its myriad points of vivid light, that face of Elizabeth's looked strangely well. She had twisted a scarf of white lace about her head, and a fur-trimmed theatre-wrap, braided with gold, about her shoulders; and the scented winds of the south had made with the silken strands of hair upon her forehead, such havoc

as a lover's kisses might have wrought. This was passing in his mind when she turned to him and said that she knew he was a great traveller. She remembered now having read some of his published books, journals of wild wanderings in African jungles, in Burmese mountain-forests, and amongst the ruined cities of South America,—scientifically worded records, bristling with botanical terms and thermometrical readings. Books written by one who lacked the knack, shared by the successful author, and the restaurateur's French cook, of flavouring a dish to tickle the public taste. Yes, Elizabeth had read Mr. Warr's books; she knew they must be very clever, but were they not a little hard for unscientific people to understand?

"You have hit the mark," said Warr grimly; "the books are not clever in the least. If they were they would be easy to understand. They were written by agreement with publishers, and the publishers have had reason to regret their confidence. They tell nothing that is new, or nothing about which anybody wants to know. All the pleasure was mine in the accumulation of the things that went to the making of them; all the weariness, I am afraid, must be the portion of the reader."

"I do not think you are quite fair," said Elizabeth's fresh voice gaily. They were passing through a grove of acacias and mimosas; the sky was shut out from above them, the fine soil crumbled beneath their feet, the sough of the sea stole in between the strains of the dance-music. "The books are only a little too dry for people who want merely to be interested and amused. If I had been in those places I would have gathered stories while you dug up facts. I would have

remembered how the people wore their quaint costumes, instead of enumerating each garment singly. I would have remembered the sunsets and the dawns, the games the little children played, and the songs their mothers sang to them; the queer food they ate, and their ways of cooking it. I would have found you out a little picture for every page, if I had been in those places with you."

Warr found his heart melting in contemplation of a nomadic existence spent by the side of so sweet a comrade. Charlotte, in the imagined character of explorer's bride, had been incongruous. Elizabeth one could not imagine out of harmony with her surroundings. An English wild-rose hedge, a dado of Oriental tiles, a thicket of Himalayan rhododendron, would have served equally well as background to those purely outlined features, those dead-leaf-coloured tresses, that gracious form. There was something of Atalanta about her. All her movements were lithe and swift like those of the maiden huntress. Her long white arm and strong white hand could have poised the spear or strung the bow with ease.

"To fall in love at sight with a mere girl. The daughter of a broken-down swell of Robertsonian Comedy type, who lives apparently on whist and billiards. Incredible!" he thought. He wondered whether Lady Baintree in her English home, absorbed in the adjustment of her friends' matrimonial affairs, had experienced any psychological sensations of uneasiness warningly indicative of the state of affairs? whether a metaphorical goose had walked over her grave and caused shudders? And at this he laughed

aloud unwittingly, and Elizabeth turned to him with a look of surprise.

"I beg your pardon!" he apologised. "An amusing idea occurred to me. I was thinking of my cousin; I came here under commission from her (she manages everybody's affairs as well as her own) to look after Dollimore and his wife. Pope's letters have not had exactly the rapturous ring in them Diana would have preferred. I suggested that he might be bilious—Latin cookery invariably plays havoc with British digestions—but at length her anxiety infected me, and I volunteered to come, to see, and report the state of affairs."

"I think," hazarded Elizabeth, *apropos* of the subject of Pope's depression, looking ahead into the jewelled darkness that concealed the bride and bridegroom, "that Mrs. Dollimore takes him about a little too much. At Rome she whisked him in and out of galleries and churches, and up and down steps in search of objects of antique interest, until he was quite exhausted. I came upon him once in the Catacombs, sitting on a pile of rubbish holding his head in his hands. She was not with him, for a wonder. She had gone with some friends for a stroll in the Piazza di Spagna, and when I said how gloomy it was down in those red stone passages, carpeted with yellow human dust, he said that the quiet was wonderfully refreshing, and that he found himself less giddy than he had felt for a long while."

They both laughed, and the talk from that point grew more confidential. The events of Elizabeth's life up to that date had not been fraught with excitement, but the simple recital was full of interest for the man whom she had charmed. His unspoken thought

hummed through his brain like the burden of a song. "She has a heart, she is not worldly, she is beautiful, and hardly knows it. She is honest and true, though her father is an unscrupulous, well-bred adventurer. Yes, she has a heart. Lucky the man who shall one day win it for his own!"

The magic hours fled. The hotel covered both of them again. Warr could not sleep. He spent a white night of blissful unrest, listening to the twittering of the orioles and thrushes in the trees beneath his window, staring at the lines of paling sky that showed through the Venetian blinds, and thinking of Elizabeth. He also busied himself in the endeavour to resolve, over and over again, an arithmetical problem to which he had never as yet bent his intellect in earnest. . . . Given,—a yearly income of £700, which has hitherto been inadequate to supply the reasonable wants of one person: Query:—How may it be divided so as to enable two to live in tolerable comfort, surrounded by the necessities and decencies of life?

He was really inclined to regret now that Granger Dorwen—the "abler kind of fellow," who was altogether more adapted to the post—the man whom Pope had fought over Diana's photograph in the old days at Warr Court—had stepped into that Persian Consulship over his own head. Teheran was a long way off, yet why need that have mattered? Elizabeth had expressed a desire to visit Persia! Elizabeth! Elizabeth! Yes, she had a heart.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BROKEN SPELL

LADY BAINTREE received Warr's promised report. He recorded the meeting with the Lady of the Cantrips, and agitated his cousin's frame with a shudder of shocked sympathy. He said that marriage had improved Charlotte. "*Of course!*" his reader ejaculated, and that he thought there was no reason to be anxious about Pope; and announced his own intention of remaining at Cannes for another week, perhaps two. There the letter ended, and a missive from Pope took up the tale. He wrote more cheerfully, without any laying of his hand upon his heart. He spoke again of Elizabeth Colquhoun. "She has certainly a great deal of charm," he said, "and Warr seems quite taken with her. They are setting out at this moment to walk to a point from which a full view of the sunset may be obtained." But this did not awaken Lady Baintree's suspicions. She knew Hilary to be a man of adamant, and besides, everybody went to look at the Cannes sunsets.

Everybody had not, in fact, assembled at the point of vantage favoured by Miss Colquhoun and Mr. Warr. It was a little grove of ilex on the overhanging brow of a cliff. Man and maid sat upon a rude stone bench, where a little trickling spring broke out from a clump of white narcissi and little violet iris and vanished into a green cleft in the cliff's brown face. Eliza-

beth had bared one white hand and taken off her hat. Warr held the hand. She had permitted him some days ago to call her by her Christian name, and he was endeavouring to familiarise his tongue with it by incessant practice. All this while the divine pageant of the sun's retirement from state went on unheeded. The sea was liquid jade and malachite and porphyry, the sky was glowing with regal crimson and gold. From the sinking disc of the luminary sprang two airy pinions, in shape like the wings with which the orb is invested in symbolical Egyptian designs—in colour, vivid green, fading into apricot towards the ends of the outspread shafts. It was a glorious sunset, but neither Elizabeth nor Warr paid much attention to it. The human splendour drew his eyes and held them, and the breeze that brought him the perfume of her hair drugged his senses like a subtle spell.

He told her she was beautiful, a statement to which the most modest woman will listen with complacency. He said that he had loved her from the first.

"And directly I saw you," she said, "I felt that we were destined to be friends. You seemed to me like a man who must have many sisters, and be loved by them all most dearly. And yet I find you have not one."

"I will endure that deprivation," Warr said, "if you will only love me. That gift is all I ask on earth or in heaven, if there be such a place?"

Elizabeth was orthodox, and reproved the suggestion of infidelity. All she had wanted to make her perfect, besides a tinge of passion, the lover thought, was a dash of religion. Faith lends ideality to the plainest features. How much more, then, of beauty may it

not lend to the already beautiful? As to the tinge of passion—he had not kissed her yet; he had not yet said the words he had been saving up for this moment, “Be my wife, Elizabeth!”

“After all,” said Elizabeth, looking away from him, and out over the changing sea, “there are some lovely moments in life. I shall remember to-day,” she sighed, and drew her hand away, and ended, “years hence, I believe.”

“Dearest,” said Warr, repossessing himself of the soft white captive, “let us remember it together. Give me the right to be always where you are. Will you marry me, Elizabeth?”

The rich, delicate colour flooded her face in an instant, but her eyes did not shrink or quail. She kept them fixed on his. After a pause, she said, “Please say that again!”

“My beloved,” said Warr, stooping to lay his cheek upon the hand, “will you let me be your husband?”

“Do you know,” said Elizabeth gravely, “that if I did, everybody would say you had made a bad match?”

“Let them say what they like,” returned Warr lightly, “so long as you say what I want to hear.”

“What shall I say?” she asked, in a child’s voice.

“Say, ‘I love you, Hilary!’” he pleaded, bending to her.

“Oh,” she said, turning pale, and with dilating eyes, “I do love you, Hilary, and I will be your wife!”

He did not embrace her; he drew her nearer, with a look of entreaty, and their lips met.

“God is good to give us this happiness,” she said after a pause. “I have always dreaded to think of a day like this.”

"Why?" Hilary asked.

"Never mind now!" said Elizabeth. She bent her head, and laid her cheek timidly upon his shoulder. "You are sure you are quite happy?" she whispered, as he bent his cheek to hers. "You are sure that you do not regret anything?"

"I regret two things extremely," said Hilary Warr. "One is that I have only just met you—that we did not come across each other years ago; the other is that I am such a poor fellow, my own! Of course I have an income, but it is not large. It is rather small; and, as regards expectations, there is not a creature in the world who is more absolutely certain than myself of never being by any possible chance a legatee." He laughed lightly, in his sense of security and peace, as a man may who is loved by a beautiful woman for his own sake.

"I thought," said the voice of Elizabeth, close to his ear, sounding oddly strained and muffled, "that—" She drew herself from his arm, and sat up. Her face was deadly pale. He looked at her in surprise, but her eyes were bent upon the ground. "I thought," she said again, "that Lady Baintree was one of the richest women in England."

"That is quite correct," answered Warr, with a slight unaccountable chill.

"And that she has no children, that all her money will be inherited by a cousin? Papa heard it from Mr. Dollimore when we first met you. . . ."

Warr answered in a voice as strained and altered as Elizabeth's own.

"Dollimore's information is reliable. All Lady Baintree's property *will* go to a cousin in course of

time. But he is a cousin by marriage—I am merely her cousin by blood.”

There was a silence. Then Elizabeth put out her hand, and picked up her hat and pinned it on. There was something fateful in the simple action. Warr’s heart leapt once, and then seemed to stand still.

She rose, and said, “It is getting late. I think we ought to be going in.”

He rose and stood at her orders, ready to follow her whithersoever she should go. But she never looked at him. She turned from the spot where they had sat hand in hand a moment before, and walked away without a single glance. Warr looked back, as exiled Adam may have looked towards Paradise, as it faded in the distance. Years afterwards he could hear the gurgle of the little spring, smell the damp earth and the trees, and recall each sunset hue. Then he followed Elizabeth in silence. Before they issued from the woods she spoke; he never forgot her voice, he never forgot the words that were the death-knell to his foolish love, to his absurd hopes, to his dying day.

“I am very sorry!—but you must let me take back the promise I gave you just now. Yes, I am very, very sorry!—and I know you will think ill of me for what I am going to say. But I can never be the wife of a poor man. I mean to marry for money!” said Elizabeth Colquhoun.

And then she turned from him, the bolt sped, the words spoken. Warr was not conscious of having received a great moral shock; sensation with him was latent; nerves and brain, and the heart that had beaten high and glowed so hotly a moment ago, were numb. He saw her go, and made no sign; the last flutter of her

garment, a purply, wine-hued cloth gown that he had liked, with its dainty touches of sable fur at throat and wrists and the borders of the skirt, had vanished amongst the trees that bordered the steep hill-path which had led them to the cliff-side before he stirred.

The spot where they had stood together was high above, yet close to the hotel, which stood upon a plateau well removed from the two populous suburbs of Cannes, surrounded with its gardens, its tennis-courts, its cricket-grounds, its well-built stables, and backed by the imposing scenery of the Estérel. The sound of gay voices, of laughter, the smacking kiss of racquet and ball, were tossed upwards by the light, warm breeze, as the gossamer spider-webs were, to tickle the unhearing ears of Warr. Minutes passed. He caught a glimpse of a crimson feather, a knot of dead-leaf-coloured hair, a close-fitting coat of knitted silk that matched its colour—the swing of a well-cut skirt about the limbs of Atalanta—Atalanta, who would never pause in the race to pick up the apples thrown by a poor wooer, a Milanion with a beggarly income of seven hundred a year. And he, who fancied himself, forsooth, a judge of character, had read sincerity in those eyes, and had said, "She has a heart!" His own heart stirred and woke from its dull torpor, and began to ache and bleed at that recollection.

Her head had lain on his shoulder; her bosom had risen and fallen with quick breaths, close to his own. Her voice had trembled, her lips had quivered, the eyes that looked shyly into his had been dewy with joyful tears. She had owned she loved him—consented to be his wife; and then he had spoken of his moderate means—owned to not being rich, corrected her mis-

taken notion that not himself, but the invalid Sir Alured Baintree, successor to her husband's title, was the heir to Diana's wealth, and—the fairy palace had collapsed—vanished like a broken bubble. How swiftly, coolly, unhesitatingly, she had dealt him the *coup de grâce*. He laughed aloud at that remembrance, and his laughter was not pleasant to hear. And then, as twilight swept down with dusky outspread pinions upon the sun-deserted land and the desolate sea, and the croquet and tennis-players at the clang of a bell trooped into the hotel to dress for dinner, Warr followed them to pack that well-worn Gladstone bag.

A note was brought him in the midst of this occupation. He had three others, in the same handwriting, in the note-case he carried in his breast pocket, also a little brown pancake of desiccated vegetable matter that had been a spray of jessamine and tuberose a week ago, when Elizabeth had worn, and he had asked for it. If a hope leapt up in him, as he handled the rough, grey envelope, that she had repented of her hardness, had written to recall her words, it died out before he had scanned the third line.

"Pray do not think too badly of me!" Elizabeth wrote; *"pray believe that if I could render possible what you wished to-day"*—(did she mean if she could confer upon him the necessary shekels? he wondered)—*"I would do it. But it is plain that our paths in life can never unite. Perhaps I am a coward?—it is true that I dread poverty. I have known the ugliness of it, and the weariness and the humiliation ever since I was quite young. I know how it kills love, I know how it estranges and embitters and soaks the uprightness out of a man, and the self-respect out of a woman. And*

for the sake of others as well as for my own—I have always meant to make what the world calls a good match. Oh! how sordid the words look on paper! Oh! if you knew how I despise myself; and yet how absolutely sure I am that”—(some words which followed were heavily scored out)—*“that I am acting for the best. Please forgive me, and forget that I ever lived and that you thought you loved me! I make no pretence of supposing that we shall remain friends, you must feel too much contempt for me to wish that. But try to believe that the days we have spent together have been the pleasantest I have ever known, that that moment before—when I thought there was no barrier to separate us—was the happiest of my life. And so good-bye. We leave for Cap d’Antibes on Tuesday; that is, father and I do. Midge goes back to her boarding-school at Brighton, the same at which, as you have told me, a little niece of yours was educated. Good-bye once more! I hope you will be happy. I hope we may not meet again—or at least for a long time.*

“Yours sorrowfully,

“ELIZABETH COLQUHOUN.”

CHAPTER IX

OUT OF EDEN

WARR crushed the letter in his hand and hurled it into the fireplace. Then he crossed the room, with a regretful impulse, and picked it up and kissed it. Then he made a little funeral pile of it and the other three notes, which were all about nothing, and topped it with the tuberose pancake, and struck a vesta, and set it alight. Then he walked downstairs, paid his bill, left a card and a message of farewell for Pope and Charlotte, and then looked about him with rather an uncertain air.

"Oh! are you going away?" shrilled a sweet treble pipe he knew, close to his shoulder.

Warr started and looked down into the big innocent blue eyes that were something like Elizabeth's grey ones. Midge tossed back her golden-amber mane with the gesture habitual to her, and displayed her little white teeth at the detested man who had robbed her of the promised new frock and the silver buckle given by Jane—Jane the Extinguished.

"Yes, I am going away!" said Warr soberly. He had taken a certain amount of interest, such as might have been felt by a brother-in-law, in Midge. He found it hard to divest her, even at that moment, of the indefinable attraction possessed by everything that belonged to Elizabeth Colquhoun. "How is it that you are not dining with the rest?"

"Because I've been to tea with the Vicomte's mamma," Midge explained, referring to a pimply, bullet-headed youth of sixteen, the hapless victim of her precocious charms, whose adoring parents rented a palatial villa in the quarter of Le Cannet. "And the Comtesse said to Adolphe: '*Tenez, cheri, dire le bénévolé*,'—the little English is accustomed, without doubt," and he reeled off a grace three yards long. And it was an awful tea—the leaves must have been used half-a-dozen times before, and there were rice and prunes, and the *pistolets* were stale, and there wasn't enough cake to go round. I shouldn't think they can be rich people at all—should you?"

Warr gave something like a groan. Then as the taxicab he had ordered came snorting to the door, he held out his strong brown hand in farewell.

"I hope you'll have a nice journey," said Midge. "Shall I give any message to Elizabeth—but of course you've said good-bye to her—you wouldn't dream of going away without; you and she have seen such a lot of one another, haven't you? And now I remember, she is lying down in her room with a bad headache, and must not be disturbed."

"There is no message," said Warr. "Except—yes, you may tell her that I shall try to do as she advises me, and that I think she is very wise! Good-bye, little lady!"

He lifted his hat gravely, and got into the hired machine, and rolled away out of the blue radiance of the electric lights. The tires left off grinding on the gravel of the courtyard, and rolled noiselessly over the velvet dust of the hot, twilight road. The chauffeur clicked with his tongue as though he drove a horse and

manipulated the steering wheel with clumsy elbow-play. As he cursed his smelly, snorting engine for a sacred pig, Warr glanced back at the big illuminated building, at the pine-crowned heights above, where only that day at the sunset hour, upon the seat beside the little spring, Elizabeth had said she loved him and would—

Was it possible that all that had happened then—all that had happened since—had been crowded into an hour or two? It seemed that cycles had crawled by since—since— They were at the railway station, though Warr had not remembered telling the taxi-man to go there, and he paid the man lavishly, and took a ticket for Nice, meaning to take the return passage by cheap popular steamer. But he never used the ticket, for Bayscourt of the Cercle Nautique and another man encountered him, hailed him as a boon companion, and bore him away to supper on their screw-yacht, which was getting up steam in the roadstead, and bound to start at daybreak for Trieste. And, not caring greatly how he disposed of himself, Warr accepted the invitation, ate, drank, and laughed with the yachtsmen, though of the flavours upon his palate he was unconscious, though of the jests they made he comprehended nothing, and slept in the cabin the courteous steward allotted him, soundly enough, but lost in the cruel, delusive joy of dreams that we all have dreamt, and found but visions at our waking. He left the vessel at Trieste, nor, I daresay, was his friend Bayscourt penetrated with more than a skin-deep regret at losing the companionship of a guest so preoccupied, silent and grave. Warr was very badly hipped over something; the host said, shaking his head. It couldn't be debt,

for he had a fad of always discharging monetary liabilities and living within his means; it couldn't be love, because he was a man who never fell in love—at least with women he couldn't marry. Warr had always been one of your cool beggars, who kept a level head under all circumstances. Sunstroke was his present ailment, most likely, or a touch of intermittent fever, brought out of one of those Asian jungles the man was always prosing about. Whatever it was, it made him dull company. So Warr and the shabby Gladstone bag went ashore at Trieste, and were next heard of at Vienna. A two-sheet letter dated from the capital, and indited in Hilary's strong, neat script, reached Lady Baintree a month later as she sat at breakfast in the morning-room at Chesterfield Gardens, dispensing kidneys and good counsel to Pope, who had dropped in. For a Government had unexpectedly collapsed, a General Election was to be expected, and the member representing the Conservative interests of Bagley-Chitwell must be on the alert. Local good opinion must be assiduously courted, local prejudices bowed to. Now was the accepted time! said Lady Baintree.

"Local good opinion, my dear Diana," said Pope, ruffling up his hair—a habit of his when excited or perturbed—"is, I regret to say, at a lower ebb than usual. The withdrawal of our patronage from Whodcoat, the Bagley-Chitwell grocer, has evoked unfavourable expressions of opinion in various quarters. Whodcoat—"

"And what in Heaven's name induced you to abandon Whodcoat?" cried Lady Baintree.

"He charged five shillings a pound for tea which

was adulterated with dried hawthorn buds—" Pope was beginning.

"He has been doing that for two hundred and thirty years," said Lady Baintree. "There have been Whodcoats in Bagley-Chitwell ever since the manor and demesne reverted to Godfrey Dollimore in the reign of Charles the Second."

"We get tea from the Stores now, and it is remarkably good," said Pope timidly.

Lady Baintree lifted her fine eyes ceiling-wards, as though unable to contemplate the spectacle of a Member of Parliament who preferred genuine Pekoe to popularity.

"What," she queried after a pause, "have been the 'other unfavourable expressions of opinion' to which you alluded?"

"Whodcoat's wife's father," began the unhappy Pope, "who, as you know, keeps the Post Office—"

"Ha 'ah!" groaned Lady Baintree.

"And Shankbone, the butcher," Pope went on, "have given up their sittings at the parish church, and announced their intention of plumping for the Radical Candidate who is a Dissenter."

"Have you taken your custom from Shankbone too?" inquired Lady Baintree, with dreadful calmness.

"He only kills once a week," explained Pope, "and then upon a Thursday. So that we naturally suffer from a plethora of animal food upon Friday, a day which Charlotte has always been accustomed to regard as one of abstinence—"

"Fiddle!" interpolated Lady Baintree.

"And by the following Wednesday it is impossible to obtain anything," said Pope, "except tough steak.

So Charlotte entered into an agreement with the Smithfield Supply Union, and our table is, I must own, better furnished. And we get our fish three times a week from Grimsby, and everything else comes from somewhere else, as far as I can remember."

"So that as far as Bagley-Chitwell is concerned you might as well be living in the moon," said Lady Baintree. She rose. "Charlotte has been guilty of a gross lack of tact," she said. "Yet the lost ground may be recovered if the custom withdrawn from Whodcoat, Shankbone, and the rest, be instantly restored. We will telegraph to your housekeeper, Mrs. Wadd, at once. Ring, and Jellicoe shall bring us a pencil and some forms—"

Pope turned bright-boiled prawn-colour. His eyes were alarming in their undue prominence.

"I am afraid—I am quite sure it will be useless," he said.

"Mrs. Wadd has discretion," returned Lady Baintree, "and is accustomed to obey my directions."

"Mrs. Wadd has left Bagley," Pope faltered. "We have a trained young lady in her place who understands book-keeping and table-decoration, and really manages the servants extremely well."

Lady Baintree's eyebrows impinged upon the roots of her hair, which was luxuriant and admirably arranged. She still, however, pointed to the bell. "We will telegraph to your steward, or if he has been sent away also, to Charlotte herself. She must know that the necessity for action is imperative. She will surely act upon my instigation?"

But Pope dolorously shook his head.

"No?" cried Lady Baintree, aghast and confounded.

"She says," Pope returned, "that you—that you interfere too much, and that she intends to manage her own household as she chooses."

Lady Baintree was stricken speechless in contemplation of the revolt of Charlotte. For the moment, the conduct of Jane of the Cantrips shone fair beside the blackness of ingratitude manifested by her successor.

"Ring!" she said still, and Pope rang. The butler brought in a letter that had come with the eleven o'clock delivery. It bore the Vienna post-mark, and was, in fact, the letter from Hilary Warr. Lady Baintree was glad of an excuse for forgetting to ask for the telegraph-forms. She opened the letter and scanned it.

Then Pope said, "You have a line from Warr, I see. How is he getting on?"

Diana said, "He is at Vienna—he writes in an odd strain. Something forced about it. What keeps him there I cannot . . . No news except— Oh! he has got the Consulship. That Teheran post, you know. Granger Dorwen has typhoid (the disease seems the exclusive property of the only class of people who make a religion of sanitary precautions). He is going to the East at once, or almost directly."

"Not Dorwen? I heard that he had taken a favourable turn."

"Not Dorwen. Hilary, of course! He is coming home to get some revolvers, and new saddlery, and chemicals and plates for photography, and clothes and sun-helmets and things; and he will sail immediately his preparations are completed. The salary is £750 yearly—just doubling his present income. We may not expect to see him for two years, unless he happens to be invalidated."

"He won't be invalided," said Pope. "If ever a man might be termed thoroughly acclimatised, that man is Warr, my dear Diana. He simply laughs at chills and fevers."

Yet if Pope could have seen into Hilary's room at the Hotel Métropole, and supposing his cousin Diana could have looked over Pope's shoulder, they would not have found him laughing.

The chill of dread, the fever of wild anticipation, by turns stagnated his blood, and sent it coursing madly through his veins. He could not rest, or eat. Sleep would not visit his hard German pillow in spite of all his wooing. Upon the strength of the Teheran Consulship, he had reopened parallels—had written to Elizabeth. Might it not be that her heart might soften knowing that another seven hundred and odd pounds per annum lay between him and the poverty she dreaded? So he had argued with himself, despising his own weakness, he who had never before set his heart between the hands of a woman to be her toy. So he had pleaded with her, eagerly, desperately, insistently, crying with a loud voice in the wilderness of his loneliness, so that if she had a heart—as he once believed—she could not choose but hear. The letter was very real, very human, very true. He never could have credited that Hilary Warr should ever write so. But he had; and as the letter broke down at the end with something like a sob, so had he. The inevitable revulsion had come after all the anger, the contempt, the wounded feeling, the determination to see her, hear her, plead with her once more—as it must come to one who loves. What does anything matter, she being so dear? What use to seek a worthier idol, the unworthy

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being above all most passionately adored? So the letter was written and directed, in the absence of any other reliable address, to the care of the little sister, whose eyes were like Elizabeth's, and who was then, no doubt, learning lessons and eating bread-and-jam at Miss Minerva Pinnock's College for Young Ladies, Magnall House, Cedar Grove, Brighton. Elizabeth had mentioned the address of this school and he had recognised it as an educational establishment where the young daughter of a married sister of his own had spent a term or two. . . . Midge would forward the letter to Elizabeth, wherever she might be staying. And Elizabeth—Elizabeth would answer it in two or three weeks' time. He knew that she had suffered even as he had suffered; that for every pang he had endured her bosom had been wrung. He knew she regretted . . . he knew she would be glad. And the first fortnight crawled by like a dying thing.

He would hear in three weeks, or six. He did a great deal of walking during those weeks of waiting. Vienna and its suburbs present unrivalled attractions to the pedestrian with an eye for the beautiful. So Warr walked about in a waking trance. The car-chauffeurs wearied of tooting their horns at him; the Jehus of hackney carriages learned not to waste *Aufs* upon a man who bore a charmed life. There are thirty thousand Italians in Vienna, and a great many of these are beggars. *Poveretta, signor mio! la carita!* seemed to Warr a kind of ceaseless chant. I am afraid to estimate the sum in kreutzers that he gave away during that period, ever to be remembered, never without a shudder.

The three weeks went by, the limit of time was

passed. Warr had not yet exhausted Vienna; he concluded to remain another week. He would have to complete his preparations in a hurry, but what of that? He stayed the week, and another, and another, and then his poor heart's hope, which had long been dwindling of an atrophy, drew its last faint breath and gave up the ghost, and a missive from the Foreign Office intimated that the appointment at Teheran must be taken up without delay. Warr packed the venerable Gladstone bag for departure.

The head-waiter at the Hotel Métropole has never forgotten the royal tip given him by an Englishman, who had not occupied a palatial suite of apartments or testified in any other way his title to the possession of immense wealth, during his somewhat protracted period of residence in a modest single apartment on the fifth floor.

"If a letter is delivered here addressed to the name engraved upon this card, which is mine, let it be forwarded at once to the direction written upon this card, which is that of an English lady, who will forward it to me wherever I may happen to be at the time. Take this in the meanwhile." This, being the superb tip. "And expect as much again if per medium of your hands I receive the letter."

And the Englishman, who must have been mad, or a great nobleman disguised, went away, and the letter did not come. And in three weeks he came again with a great deal of luggage, which confirmed the waiter in belief of his nobility. And the letter had not come. And he went away, giving more money and leaving a fresh address, a Persian one this time. And the letter

never came at all. And Warr went out to the East to take up his official duties, inwardly crying:

"Has she a heart? . . . Oh! Elizabeth, Elizabeth!" . . .

CHAPTER X

LADY BAINTREE AT WORK

THE change in Charlotte grew more and more manifest. Was this the plainly-robed young person who, single-handed, had settled the opposing claims of coal-and-blanket clubbers? Was this the administratrix of all difficulties that might be expected to arise in the course of a Mothers' Meeting? This loud and showy incarnation of the latest Society tricks and manners; the would-be leader of a set of spirits, not of the choicest. She had dyed her hair of Titian red; her cheeks, lips, eyebrows, were advertisements for various fashionable cosmetics. "She refuses to canvass for Pope because she does not like his colours," Lady Baintree groaned in bitterness of spirit. "I wonder what he thinks of hers?"

Pope was dumb, whatever his thoughts might be. But perhaps he whispered to himself, when he found himself quite alone, that Jane, at least, had never been painted quite so like a theatrical poster, had never ridden *en cavalier* in the Park or to the covert, or gathered beneath his roof so queer an assortment of intimate male and female friends. He avoided Lady Baintree, but then the election was coming on, and his constituency of Bagley-Chitwell occupied a good deal of his time. And Lady Baintree's hands, always full, were heaped up and running over. There were so many eligible men this season who ought to marry! There were so many marriageable girls who must!

The most eligible of all the younger men was the Marquess of Rotherholme, now the only son and heir of the Duke of Norchester. The Duchess had written, in blue pencil from her Bath-chair, to Lady Baintree, when, upon the death of an invalid elder brother, his somewhat rackety junior had succeeded to the title:

"My dear, if you can find a respectable young person who would be willing to put up with Rotherholme for life, I implore you to do so. He has given his word both to the Duke and myself, that he will not oppose any reasonable measures that may be taken for his good. He means to turn over a new leaf."

"He has turned over enough new leaves," commented Lady Baintree, "to make a volume—for private circulation!" But she was flattered by the reliance placed in her. "Perhaps," she wrote back, "Lord Rotherholme will call? I am conscientious,—and whatever influence I may bring to bear in the cause of your son must be justified by candid conviction. Personal opinion cannot be formed without personal acquaintance."

To Pope Lady Baintree said, "Lord Rotherholme—the new Marquess. . . . You knew him at Cambridge?"

"I did, slightly," admitted Pope. "So did Warr. He was then Lord Richard Milwall, and— But that is ancient history!"

Lady Baintree shrugged her shoulders. "Of course he used to spend his time in screwing up Proctors—"

"I imagine," said Pope, "that he chiefly employed it in screwing up himself. A joke was made, I remember—I have no doubt it was a stupid one—about Mil-

wall's 'big goes' having put the Little Go out of the question."

"Puerile!" said Lady Baintree, lifting her eyebrows.

"Possibly, my dear Diana," admitted Pope. "But the man was, and is, a queer customer."

"He is the catch of the season," retorted Lady Baintree.

"So is the influenza," returned Pope with unusual smartness.

"Every Society mother with a marriageable daughter," cried Lady Baintree, "will bait her hook for that man!"

"Then the Society mothers of marriageable daughters will be angling for a very queer fish, my dear Diana," said Pope.

"I am sure," protested Lady Baintree, "that he passed into the Army with a great deal of credit."

"And passed out of it a few years later," Pope was understood to murmur, "with none at all."

"Pope," she said, "you are a perfect raven!"

Pope had opened his mouth to reply, when Lord Rotherholme was announced. He came in awkwardly, with an air of wishing himself somewhere else. He presented himself to the observer as a short, spare, baldish, dissipated-looking man of thirty-five, with a horsey manner, and the peculiarly stiff gait that seems to belong to devotees of the training-stable and the race-course. He clipped his speech after the usual method of sporting amateurs; his grammar and orthography were far from faultless, and his manner, when in conversation with ladies, was not free from embarrassment. He dressed well, but evinced a predilection

for white spats, and wore as a scarf-pin a nail from the hoof of a famous racer, set in platinum and diamonds. Lady Baintree greeted him effusively.

"I have so looked forward to this!" she said.

"You're uncommonly kind," said Lord Rotherholme. "My mother, you see, she kept writin', tellin' me I ought to come; and so you see I've done it!"

"I think you have met my friend Mr. Pope Dolli-more?" said Lady Baintree.

"Not that I remember," said Lord Rotherholme; "but it's as likely as not!" He nodded to Pope cheerfully, and the conversation languished.

Lady Baintree inquired as to the health of the Duke.

"The old gentleman—I take it from the papers,"—said Lord Rotherholme, "is pretty fit! I don't get my information at first hand, because he's none too sweet on me, to give you the straight tip. He came the Heavy Father once too often, ten years ago, and since then we never speak as we pass by—according to the poet."

Lady Baintree recalled the particulars of the quarrel, and hastened to change the conversation. "I hope we shall see a great deal of you now," she remarked. "You must not absent yourself for the future. Society does not easily forgive a slight. Society is exigent."

"I can't say," observed Rotherholme, "that I've ever gone in much for Society. Your regular highbrow folks with their noses in the air, queer me altogether. Not but what I'm a popular man in my own circle, y'know!—with lots of pals of the best—both sorts! Of course I ran a bit wild in the days when I was short of the boodle—cash, I mean—and fond of the chase. But now I've pulled up, and mean to go steady.

A position to keep up; and one of the best, ain't it?"

"You are to be congratulated upon an admirable resolution!" said Lady Baintree warmly.

Lord Rotherholme yawned a colossal yawn, and the servant came in with tea. "Not for me!" he said genially, when Lady Baintree proffered the cheering cup. "I never could stand the stuff. A woman's drink I call it—that is, for some women!" He rose to go, and got entangled with his hat and stick, and then Pope at the window started and looked for means of escape, for Charlotte's landau-limousine had stopped at the door. Before the little man could effect his desired exodus, however, his better-half was upon the field. She bore in her wake a pleasant example of the power of a well-chosen gown and a Paris hat to set off to advantage the charms of a charming young woman.

"So this is Miss Colquhoun?" said Lady Baintree. She held Elizabeth's hand in both her own and looked at her meditatively. Pope knew the look; the kindling of a fateful purpose was in it.

"I shall take that girl up and marry her," said Lady Baintree to herself, when Lord Rotherholme had conveyed himself and his white spats and horse-shoe nail pin away. "She is exquisite, not the sort of girl to be thrown away on an ineligible." And then and there she made up her mind that Elizabeth Colquhoun and no other woman should be Marchioness of Rotherholme.

CHAPTER XI

CHARLOTTE DRIVES AWAY

IT should be explained that Charlotte, for once proving amenable to a wish expressed by her spouse, had invited Miss Colquhoun to spend a fortnight at Cadogan Square. Pope, as we know, had, a few months previously, exerted himself to some slight degree in enlisting the good graces of Lady Baintree upon the side of the *débutante*. Her poverty excepted, and the fact of her filial relationship towards a bankrupt ex-officer of cavalry, who consumed his existence in migrating from one Continental watering-place to another, and whose means of subsistence were not only precarious but dubious, Elizabeth's advantages were undeniable. She was niece to a well-known if unpopular peer; she was the grand-daughter of an archbishop; her personal advantages were obvious and undeniable. Such a girl deserved to make an excellent match—the excellent match that Lady Baintree had in her mind's eye. Yes, Elizabeth Colquhoun should be the Marchioness of Rotherholme or the Countess of Clashburnie. Although the Earl was extremely young, in fact only just of age, and she had almost pledged her word to her bosom friend, Lady Caroline Wragge, who had a niece upon the market, a sweet girl with a *dot* of twenty thousand. . . . You will perceive that Lady Baintree's hands were extremely full. So she asked Elizabeth to come and stay with her for the re-

mainder of the season. She was urgent in her invitation, for certain scandals were afloat which, if they rested upon even a slight foundation of fact, rendered Charlotte an undesirable chaperon. The moustached, be-fezzed and be-starred personality of Prince Said Ahmed Bey, chief military *attaché* of the Turkish Embassy in London, though admittedly a conspicuous and dazzling unit among a heterogeneous collection of notabilities mustered at a public function, might at the same time be considered as an ornament too glaringly bizarre for a West End boudoir. . . .

"She was at the meet of the Coaching Club," said Lady Caroline Wragge, bringing the first puff of what was in the wind into Lady Baintree's drawing-room. "She sat on the box of Mr. Cowley Crindall's coach, wearing a gown and hat which simply do not admit of description. The Asiatic person sat behind her. He wore violet gloves, and two orchids in his buttonhole, and the Crindall coach is mulberry-colour picked out with red, and the team were piebalds, unless I am mistaken. The whole effect was Cubist—an impressionistic orgy of shrieking hues."

"Heavens!" ejaculated Lady Baintree. "And to think that that woman was brought up in an English vicarage; and wore serge and tweed skirts and cotton blouses all the year round; managed Clothing Clubs and Mothers' Guilds, and—until ten months ago—had experienced no greater dissipation than a tennis-party or a church bazaar. What can one say? Who is one to believe in?"

"One can only say," returned Lady Caroline, "that she is making up for lost time . . . and one is to believe in one's self and one's set, so long as they do not

openly defy the conventionalities. I feel tempted to paraphrase a text, Diana, and to say that good form covers a multitude of sins. As for Mrs. Pope Dollimore, she is becoming notorious, and that in a clumsy kind of way which I cannot but disapprove. And mark my words, Diana, the man who has married her will rue the day. My dear, try these salts!" For Lady Baintree presented a suffering countenance.

"The match was of my making, Caroline," she murmured between inhalations.

"You poor dear!"

"And I am afraid it is not going to turn out well."

"I share your fear!"

"Caroline, the faith of those who confide in my good judgment will totter."

"Diana, I shall bring you my Dolly to-morrow."

"Dear friend!"

"I shall place her unreservedly in your hands, and bid you dispose of her to the best advantage."

"Caroline, I am penetrated too deeply for words!"

"No thanks, Diana. But remember I do not withdraw the opinion already uttered. If you like to regard the words as prophetic,"—Lady Caroline pressed her friend's hand, and rustled to the door—"I make no objection."

"You think— You believe—?"

"I think Mrs. Pope Dollimore has risked her reputation in the violet-gloved hands of that Asiatic dandy!"

Lady Caroline surged out of the room upon a billow of brocade, and ebbed downstairs, leaving Lady Baintree to drown a lively apprehension in Orange Pekoe. In the middle of the second cup Lady Caroline's

prophecy was fulfilled. Mr. Pope Dollimore sent up word to say that he was waiting downstairs in the library, and begged to speak to Lady Baintree upon a matter of urgent business.

Lady Baintree went down. He was sitting with his elbows on the *Nineteenth Century and After*, clutching his hair. He lifted his dejected head at the sound of Diana's footsteps. There was a damp kind of pallor upon him, and he puffed and blew as though he had been indulging in some violent form of exercise.

"What is the—what has happened?" asked Lady Baintree.

"Diana," he said, "I am the victim of an adverse fate. My Parliamentary career must close—from to-day!"

She almost screamed, "Why?"

The little man laughed in a hollow way.

"Why? You shall judge, Diana—you shall judge! Can a man face his constituency upon the platform? Can he rise as their representative in the House of Commons? Can he take up the cudgels in defence of that Bulwark of the British Constitution—the Domestic Hearth—when his own has been not once, but twice, publicly swept up in the Divorce Court? The second time," he groaned, "with a Turk's head broom!"

Lady Baintree knew the worst now.

Another of Diana's carefully-blown bubbles had exploded. Not even the taste of soap was left behind. Death would have been welcome to a woman whose efforts had been so cruelly wasted, whose benevolent intentions had been so miserably frustrated. One thing, however, confirmed Lady Baintree in the determination of continued existence—she made an

effort—she relegated Charlotte to that corner of her mind, seldom visited, where she kept her failures, and determined that success and more than success should crown her efforts in the cause of Elizabeth Colquhoun. The girl was beautiful; she possessed charm; she had an innate sense of fitness and propriety; she would pass; she was gifted with the graces requisite to make a figure in Society; she was of the stuff to make a great lady, though the partner who, Lady Baintree had determined, should effect this transformation, was far from being a great gentleman. He submitted himself meekly enough to Lady Baintree's discipline; he came to the house when he was asked, and behaved himself when he came. He did not shine in the drawing-room; at the dinner-table he passed with rapidity through several stages, beginning with sulkiness, resulting in loquacity, and culminating with sleepiness or ill-temper, according to the quality of the champagne. At music-hall or race-meeting he might be said to be at his best, though on the one hand his familiarity with the *coulisses* of the variety theatre was apt to be manifested by certain nods, winks and wreathed smiles addressed to him by the slightly-draped young persons who sprawl or kick, languish or entwine, according to the taste of the stage-manager, and are dignified with the collective title of the Chorus. And, on the other hand, his extensive acquaintance among the *habitués* of the training-stables, the betting-ring and the weighing-room was apt to lead to embarrassment, when Lord Rotherholme appealed to his groom, by his Christian name, to corroborate some generally-made statement; or introduced strangely-attired personages, in white hats, to astonished ladies as persons gifted with unlim-

ited prescience in the selection of winners, and extraordinary generosity in the bestowal of infallible tips. Elizabeth won a great many dozens of gloves under the advice of Lord Rotherholme that May. She agreed with Lady Baintree that he was an oddity—she did not manifest annoyance at his familiarity or confusion in the reception of his awkward compliments. For he was attracted by Lady Baintree's latest *protégée*, though perhaps Dolly Garraway, the niece of Lady Caroline Wragge, was more to his taste. Dolly had round eyes, very blue and bright and sparkling, and a round little figure, and great lumps of barley-sugar-coloured hair, and a saucy manner. If she had not been the heiress of a deceased uncle who had made a fortune out of his brewing-vats, she would have been the most delightful little barmaid that ever nodded and smiled over a breast-knot of gillyflowers and pinks at the thirsty patrons of a country tap. But if ever the glances of Lord Rotherholme were attracted in that direction, he was recalled to a sense of what was expected of him by the sceptre of Lady Baintree, pointing, not in the direction of Princess Fairhead, but in that of Princess Grave Eyes.

We must understand that this rake, now in process of reformation, was swayed by other considerations than those of filial piety. As Lord Richard Milwall, he had run through a great deal of money; his affairs were heavily involved; the lenders of cash at usury took a tender interest in his welfare. As the Marquess of Rotherholme, once his enormous liabilities were settled he ran risk of being left but a small slice out of the cake already eaten up at interest. It depended on the parental complaisance whether the huge estates

of Harpenfold and Tadchester, the coal-mines in the North, and the extensive London rentals of which the deceased Marquess—never more than half alive, when living—had enjoyed possession, should accrue to his successor. Clearly the first move towards attainment of these must be compliance with his mother's wishes, expressed, as we know, in that letter to Lady Baintree, written in blue pencil from the Duchess's Bath-chair.

Elizabeth enjoyed the goods the gods provided. It was her first real London season, and she spent it under the auspices of a hostess justly celebrated for the tact, good-nature, and generosity with which she assisted and encouraged, aided and empowered pretty young people to disport themselves. If ever Miss Colquhoun's remembrance strayed towards Cannes, and a particular sunset upon which she had gazed in company with Hilary Warr, she checked the impulse to regret. He had walked out of her life, vanished at her command, obediently, completely. There had been with her a time of relenting, a season of repentance, when, if he had given sign, or uttered word, Elizabeth would have said, "Come back!—come back and forget." But he had not made the sign or written the message. Either the revelation of her worldly wisdom had withered his newly-born passion, or he had not cared enough to make a second essay.

"Lady Baintree is too kind," she wrote to Midge, eating bread and butter enlivened with surreptitious potted meats, curling her red-gold tresses with forbidden tongs, and learning lessons at Miss Minerva Pinnock's Brighton establishment; "she will not hear of my leaving Chesterfield Gardens before the end of the season, and then I am to rejoin her at Westwood

Hall in three weeks. She is kind enough to say that she will be glad to have you there for the holidays; there is a treat to which you may look forward. She is handsome and full of spirit, something like her cousin, Mr. Hilary Warr, whom you will remember meeting at Cannes; and who has gone out to Persia to take an official appointment, she tells me, and, indeed, I saw it mentioned in the papers quite a long time ago. He is poor, and very proud, she says, or he need not be so poor. You remember the ridiculous mistake father made about his being heir to the Westwood estates, instead of Sir Alured Baintree, who is a little man with a hump—a horrid little man.”

The maid deputed to wait on Miss Pinnock’s parlour-boarders entered with a parcel at that moment; and Midge dropped the letter, and upset the French theme on which she had been engaged—a punishment theme, we grieve to say—and jumped up with a shrill little scream of childish delight. A gold bangle and a silk frock—a real gold bangle and a real silk frock were revealed upon the removal of labels, string, and many wrappings of thick brown paper.

“A present, Mary,” exclaimed the proud recipient, “from Lady Baintree, an old friend of our family. She is immensely rich—she has a house in London and an estate in Suffolk—and she has invited me to spend the autumn season there.”

Mary cried, “Law!” and, satisfied with the effect created, Midge took her prizes upstairs to the bedroom shared with another parlour-boarder, a girl of no spirit, whose relatives were vulgar persons in trade, and who turned a large unhearing ear, and a fat, unresponsive countenance to Midge’s magniloquent recitals of ex-

traordinary experiences, and gorgeous prospects for the future. The chamber was remote and angular, of severe tidiness and uncheering drab hue, upon the surface of which Midge's be-ribboned photograph-frames and painted brackets made patches of gaudy colour. Her wardrobe hung in an unpainted deal press; her most cherished possessions were contained in an antique brass-nailed hair-trunk that had been her mother's. Midge unlocked this receptacle, and deposited the precious gifts therein, against the hour of recess. Then she hesitated, and then, from the bottom of the trunk, fished up a Chinese puzzle-box, which opened after some intricately simple method, as difficult to discover as easy to achieve, once mastered; and drew therefrom a letter, bearing this address—

Miss Colquhoun,
c/o Miss M. Colquhoun,
At Miss Pinnock's,
Magnall House,
Cedar Grove,
Brighton.

The letter dated months back—had been opened and read; it could not be given to Elizabeth *now*—without an unpleasant explanation which might lead to the withholding of choicer things even than gold bangles and silk dresses; even to the cancellation of that invitation to spend the autumn holidays at Westwood Hall. And—besides, would it be wise for a little sister, acting solely in the interests of a beloved relative, to hand over such a letter? Mr. Warr was dreadfully poor—even with the appointment of which he spoke,

his income amounted to little over £1,400 a year. If Elizabeth married a cousin of Lady Baintree's, it ought to be the *rich* cousin, the little man with the hump. And in keeping the letter back there lay no danger. Warr had said, "*If within such and such a time I do not hear from you, it shall be as though these words had never been written. All that I now remember so longingly, so regretfully, I will try to blot out; it shall be as though the sun had never risen upon my hope that day at Cannes, or the night fallen upon my wretchedness.*"

It was a splendid letter, Midge thought—exactly like a love-letter in a novel. If it made her cry—almost—it might make Elizabeth shed tears in earnest. And, with her advantages, Elizabeth owed it to her family to make a splendid match.

Truly, the children of this generation are deadly wise—before the boys are out of knickerbockers they have eaten of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge; before the girls are out of pinafores they know the world; otherwise than as it appears in the projection of Mercator. Warr's letter went back into the Chinese puzzle-box, and the pupils' tea-bell rang, and Midge skipped downstairs.

CHAPTER XII

SOME PROSPECTS AND A LETTER

AND now the one question I ask myself is," said Lady Baintree ere the green spring foliage of the trees in West End parks and gardens had dimmed under the dust and sun of June, "Have I done the right thing?"

Lady Caroline Wragge elevated her eyes and hands in deprecation of the question.

"Undoubtedly yes!"

"Elizabeth Colquhoun's future is absolutely secured," said Lady Baintree.

"Elizabeth Colquhoun is settled if ever a woman was!" said Lady Caroline. "Let us hope," she added, with a certain grimness, "that she is grateful?"

"Oh! she positively brims with proper feeling," Lady Baintree cried.

"When did Rotherholme come to the point?"

"After Derby Day. His horse 'Winks,' as, of course, you are aware, was unlucky."

"It ran seventh, I hear people say. But does not a horse take a seventh prize for running seventh? I am so ill-informed about these matters."

"Nor am I an authority. But Rotherholme told me in his quaint way that he got 'landed a cracker,' and, I believe, that that means to lose heavily. And he said, 'This sets me more than ever on keeping in with the old Mum!' Of course he meant the dear Duchess. 'If

I don't she has me on'—what is the technical expression?"

"Toast?"

"Precisely. And so Elizabeth sat next him at dinner that night—he was kind enough to place Copper Beeches at my disposal for the Epsom Summer Meeting."

"That sweet place where the invalid Marquess used to live so much?"

Lady Baintree nodded. "And they used to stroll together round the gardens after dinner. One relaxes the severity of a chaperon somewhat on these sporting occasions—"

"'Umph!"

"And Dolly tells me—she and Captain Soper happened also to be walking in the gardens—"

"Diana, is it possible that you permitted my foolish child to patrol the grounds after dark in company with a prepossessing pauper?"

"Caroline, I regret the circumstance, but Dolly was under the care of Ellen Carr-Chippendale, to whose chaperonage you entrusted her. It would have been infamous taste on my part to interfere—and my mind was entirely occupied with Elizabeth. To proceed, I went into Elizabeth's room at the retiring hour—and found her in tears. I ascertained that Rotherholme had committed himself to a definite proposal of marriage, and that Elizabeth had accepted—and took her in my arms. She cried hysterically, as girls will, and sobbed out, 'Oh! Lady Baintree, I am the most miserable girl in the world to-night!' 'And to-morrow,' I answered, 'you will be the best-envied woman in London.'"

"Then?"

"Then as she gradually became composed, I left her. I did not attempt to interview Rotherholme before the following morning."

"Very wise!" pronounced Lady Caroline. "Very wise!"

"After breakfast I opened the subject. Rotherholme admitted the truth of Elizabeth's statement, and told me I might telegraph to the Duchess, if I liked. I did telegraph, and here is her reply." Lady Baintree drew an envelope from her pocket with her handkerchief, handed one to Lady Caroline, and dried her eyes with the other. "Caroline," she said impressively, "a mother's blessing is a great reward."

Lady Caroline perused. At the second line she nodded; at the third she heaved a sigh; at the fourth she became deeply moved; at the conclusion she fell upon the neck of Lady Baintree. "A victory!" she cried. "Oh! a triumph indeed! Harpenfold and Tadchester entailed for the benefit of heirs, those Yorkshire coal-mines and—"

"You omitted to read the postscript," said Lady Baintree. "The Duchess has promised Elizabeth as her bridal gift, the Norchester pearls."

"Diana!"

"The words are here!"

"The whole seven rows?"

Lady Baintree nodded.

"*And* the clasp?"

"And the clasp!"

"Every time that girl puts those jewels on," said Lady Caroline with deep emotion, "she ought to *pray* for Diana Baintree."

"She will!—she will! Oh! is it not gratifying to

think that my poor efforts have been crowned with such success?"

"I must admit it, Diana—you are a perfect missionary to marriageable girls. Oh! I burn to bless you in my Dolly's name."

"Dear Dolly! Such a sweet, sensible girl."

"She has been carefully brought up, Diana."

"All her principles are perfect, I am sure."

"I can vouch for it. Set that child blindfold to pick a husband out of a row, and she would unhesitatingly settle on a millionaire. If I were called hence to-morrow I could lay my head upon my dying pillow and say, My girl will never give away her heart under £18,000 a year."

Lady Baintree tapped Lady Caroline archly upon the chin with a paper-cutter.

"The Earl of Clashburnie will have £18,000 a year."

Lady Caroline closed her eyes and moved her head from side to side with a China-mandarin-like oscillation.

"It has occurred to me—I mean the possibility—but I dared not cherish it. The Countess of Clashburnie is the most rigid of Northern Conservatives. Would she be likely to open her arms to a daughter-in-law with whose blood—to you I speak openly—beer might be said to mingle?"

"My own Caroline, you agitate yourself without cause. Is it possible that you have never heard of the Clashburnie whisky?"

"The Clashburnie whisky?" . . .

"Lord Ronald Farintoll, the brother of the late Earl, and uncle of the present, is the proprietor of the Glas-

gow distillery where the Clashburnie whisky is manufactured. I understand that Clashburnie Castle is represented on the labels, and that the family coat of arms is the trademark."

An extraordinary weight was lifted from the mind of Lady Caroline. She tripped downstairs to her autobrougham as lightly as her weight would permit. Upon the threshold she encountered Miss Colquhoun and Lord Rotherholme returning from a ride. She congratulated the betrothed couple in tones of heart-felt emotion.

"You happy, happy girl!" she cried, and embraced Elizabeth. "Dear Lord Rotherholme, let me felicitate you warmly, most warmly, upon this delightful news! Everybody rejoices, believe me, everybody rejoices!" . . .

"It's all over the shop, I know," said Rotherholme blankly. "Everybody is confounded kind, I'm sure. But, you know, don't you know!—for a man to be treated like public property—and to have his hand squeezed off by people he don't ever remember to have met before, is uncommonly tryin'. But as you say, I'm an engaged man now—and I've got to put up with things. Lizzy—"

"Yes, Richard?" Miss Colquhoun dutifully responded, standing there in her well-cut habit on the black and white marble squares of the entrance-hall, with her dead-leaf hair and pale pure face in relief against the high dado of gilt Japanese leather. She looked handsome, extremely handsome, thought Lady Caroline.

"We've done our equestrian out," said her *fiancé*, "and now, supposin' you don't want me, I think I'll

pad the hoof. There's a blo—a chap at Tattersall's waitin' to see me about a hunter—and I promised I'd do a bit of lunch with a wo—a man I know at the Tubs' Club. So—"

So Elizabeth's lover remounted with a knowing nod and smile, and touching his hat to the ladies less gracefully but more familiarly than his groom, rode down the street.

Lady Caroline drove away. Elizabeth went upstairs to her room. She threw her whip upon a table, knocking over a miniature vase; she unpinned her hat so hastily that she tore her veil—she dragged her gloves off so roughly that her engagement ring, a massive half-hoop of diamonds and Burmese rubies, sprang from her finger and leaped across the room. She watched the shining thing disappear under a cabinet, and then walked to the window and looked out.

"There goes an old woman," she said, "leading an old blind man. They are husband and wife. See how carefully she steers him over the crossing. She isn't tired of him yet, though they have spent long struggling years together. They are poor now, and they were poor at the outset, but that did not make them afraid. Would they think me wise or foolish, if they knew what I had done?

"And there goes a girl, a little nursery governess or music teacher of the humble kind. Beside her walks a young man who is probably a shop-assistant. Such a girl would look up to me as a being altogether beyond her sphere. Would she envy me, or pity me, if she knew what I had done?

"And a baby's funeral is passing, the coffin no larger than a glove-box. If that child had lived, to be reared

among surroundings as sordid as mine, to be met at every turn by difficulties, hampered at every step in life by the vulgar need of money, it might become like me—as hard, as worldly, as calculating, as capable of selling its birthright of love for a mess of pottage. Oh, little child, your mother may cry as bitterly as my mother would have done, but if she knew you were saved from ever growing up to be what I am to-day, she would be glad at heart to know your tiny body was lying so pale and pretty in your white velvet cas-
ket, and your spotless soul was safe in Heaven!”

And then her mood changed.

“I am a fool,” she said, “and ungrateful to wish things other than they are. I shall have a great title, and live in great houses. Everything that Society thinks indispensable to happiness will be mine. Papa shall have enough money to live upon without borrowing—if he can live without borrowing. Midge shall have every advantage. I will take care that she is not hardened and spoilt for lack of all the pleasant things of life as I have been. Upon the whole, I am content. I would not have things otherwise. But I wish *he* had loved me enough to give me *one* chance . . . written one line . . . made some sign . . . I wish he had done that! To give me up without a word—it shows how the revelation of my meanness must have shocked him! Yes, it shows!” . . .

She rang for the maid placed at her disposal by Lady Baintree.

“Help me to change,” she said; “but first pick up my ring. It has rolled under there. It is always falling off. Why do you shake your head? Is it an unlucky sign? Everything is an unlucky sign. That my

habit lies on the floor is a sign that you will have to pick it up and brush it."

Then she went down to luncheon.

"So Richard has gone to Tattersall's and the 'Tubs,'" said Lady Baintree. "It is as well, for I must have bored him this afternoon. I have had a long, interesting letter from my cousin, Hilary Warr, of whom you know a little, I believe. He seems perfectly satisfied with the prospect of passing the rest of his life in Persia. These heart-free men can settle down anywhere; and with the exception of our cousinship, Warr has not a single tie, I verily believe, of any binding kind. He will never be a lover."

Then she read select passages from Warr's letter, which indeed Elizabeth found interesting.

"There are no antiques to be obtained now in the once happy hunting ground of the collector," wrote Warr. "Travelling dealers from Calcutta, Venice, Heaven knows where else, snap up all the old enamelled metal work, tiles, pots with the *reflet metallique*, genuine old Bokhara carpets (the modern ones are woven of wool manufactured at Bradford and dyed with German anilines), and all the other things that foolish folk covet. Still, I have procured a talisman that I shall send you at the first opportunity. It is a piece of Tari stone, oddly carved. The Tari stone is a talisman, among the tribes of Persian nomads. Its peculiar property consists in putting the clock of Time back as many years as the owner wishes, if the wish be expressed with sufficient fervency. I have no desire to put the clock of Time back; not one episode in my past life would I re-create, were it possible. . . . To look

forwards—forwards, is the only thing for me. . . . So—”

Lady Baintree happened to glance up, and uttered an exclamation of alarm.

“Elizabeth, my dear child, you have over-tired yourself, or you are ill—one or the other.”

“I am not tired in the least, or at all ill,” Elizabeth protested with white lips, “and the letter is so much in Mr. Warr’s style. . . . I fancied for the moment I heard him speaking.”

“Such a talisman as he describes must be a very uncomfortable possession,” said Lady Baintree. “Even I, with all my memories of an ideal period in the past, would hardly dare to use it. Putting the clock of Time back would confer certain advantages, I grant, but at the same time it would entail many inconveniences. One could only do again things which have been done—”

“Or undo them!” said Elizabeth.

“One could only say things over again—”

“Or unsay them! I am afraid you are right; I am a little over-tired. I think I will go to my room,” said the best-envied young woman in London miserably.

CHAPTER XIII

CONGRATULATIONS

ARLING BESS,—*I got your letter with the glorious news. Tucker brought it in yesterday in the file of the aljeb*" (scratched out) "*algge*" (scratched out) "*algebra class. I opened it at once in spite of rules. I jumped for joy nearly to the ceiling, and the General Symbols' tumbled on the floor. Miss Lock came in to ascertain the cause of the disturbance. She always uses such long words, horrid, magic old thing!* 'Miss Marietta Colquhoun,' said she, *her conduct surprises and shocks me.*' I said, 'My sister Elizabeth is going to be married.' She said, 'I am pleased to hear it; but that does not excuse your breach of propriety, and you will write out 100 lines of penitence after school hours.' Then curiosity got the better of her, and she asked me the name of Miss Elizabeth's fiancé. I said, 'The Marquiss of Rotherham,' and she let me off the 100 lines and gave them all a half holiday. They wouldn't have been able to see the chalk figures on the board any more; they were too big! 'And the Marquiss is tremendously rich,' they keep saying, 'and will be a Duke when his father dies.' How pleased poor papa will be. He always said you ought to make a splendid match! With affectionate congratulations from your ever loving father,

"MIDGE.

"P. S.—*Is the engagement ring worth a great deal of money? You told me it was rubies, and Effie Traill, whose father is a jeweller, I believe, though Miss Pinnock calls him a diamond merchant, says rubies are not so valuable as they used to be.*

"P.P.S.—*I am to be head bridesmaid; you always promised it. Do have Empire fillets and feathers for the hair, and tutu upper-skirts embroidered tulle over velvet is the very latest thing!*

"P.P.S.S.—*So the wedding is to be in July. Such a weddingy month, isn't it? I am to live with you after you are married, remember. Has the Marquiss got a castle all his own? and is he very handsome? Effie says he's quite awful, but she is a jealous cat."*

Elizabeth received a great many other congratulations.

"I should be content to lay my head down upon my pillow and resign existence there and then," said Lady Caroline Wragge, "if my Dolly were about to enter the world upon conditions as advantageous. Fortunate girl! bless you!"

Pope Dollimore took Miss Colquhoun by both hands, and pumped them solemnly up and down for some little time.

"I hope—I sincerely hope," he said, "that you will not be very un—I mean that you will be very happy." He sighed and shook his head. "Life is uncertain," he said, "especially married life. We're here to-day and gone to-morrow—here to-day and gone to——" He dropped Elizabeth's hands and went away dejectedly.

"You must excuse him, love," said Lady Baintree.

"His mind is sadly unsettled and depressed. In fact he is in hourly expectation of the *decree nisi* being made absolute, and that kind of suspense is very wearing." Then she was summoned away, as a fresh shower of blotting-pads and silver inkstands descended. The boudoir was already crammed to bursting.

Dolly Garraway dropped in to tea, rather late, and, as usual, in a desperate hurry.

"Oh, you dear!" she cried, "what lovely news!" She gave Elizabeth a double-barrelled kiss of rapture upon either cheek, and glanced coquettishly in the direction of a tall, stout, florid, rather stupid young Guardsman, who was in fact the particular detrimental regarded by Lady Caroline with such profound suspicion and distrust. Captain Charles Soper generally managed to arrive a few minutes earlier or later than Miss Garraway. One would have said, had Dolly's principles not been so firmly founded on good sense, that the young man was furnished with a programme of her movements. But, humanly speaking, that was impossible in a girl so well brought up.

A servant entered with a message from Lady Baintree. A fresh batch of wedding presents had arrived—the presence of Miss Colquhoun was urgently desired for five minutes in the boudoir. "I'll wait for you, dear," Dolly said affectionately. "I want you to tell me *all* about *everything*," and she kissed Elizabeth again, and waved her little gloved hand to her as she went out of the room, prettily. The Guardsman sat glum and stolid. Silence prevailed for exactly thirteen seconds.

"Oh—, what a cross, cross thing it is!" said Dolly, sitting on the sofa and addressing nobody in particular.

"If I am cross, and I don't admit it, you know!" said the Guardsman, "it's because you're coming the distant dodge too strong. To-day you gave me three fingers, by George! and pretended you'd forgotten my name, and yesterday at the croquet-match at Queen's you said 'shut up,' because I called you 'darling.'"

"Aunt Caroline's glasses were turned our way," protested Dolly, "and you were looking so dreadfully affectionate."

"I'd got my back turned to Lady Caroline," retorted the aggrieved one, "and she couldn't see anything but the parting of my hair."

"That kind of expression soaks through so. Oh! Charles!"

The tone was deprecating, even appealing.

Charles changed his chair for the sofa.

"It's all right, I'll keep my ears open," he said, nodding reassuringly towards the door. "Look here! Lady Baintree has asked me down to Westwood for September. I can't imagine how she came to do it."

"Can't imagine! You have my tactics to thank for it, you ungrateful boy."

"Dear, blessed little woman!"

Dolly's cheek was very near—Dolly's inviting little waist was temptingly within clasp. If Lady Caroline had entered the room at that moment she would have received a staggering shock.

"We shall have a fortnight together without Lady Caroline. It sounds too good to be true."

"I'm afraid Aunt Caroline is coming," said Aunt Caroline's niece with a whimper.

"Down to Westwood!" The Guardsman's round red and white countenance elongated surprisingly.

"I thought," he said ruefully, "that Lady Baintree had taken you in hand."

"Lady Baintree," Dolly replied with some dignity, "has kindly undertaken to provide me with a suitable husband before the winter season."

"But she sha'n't—she sha'n't!" shouted the exasperated Charles. "Hang it! you don't mean to say you've forgotten—"

"Forgotten! As if I could!" cried Dolly. "I'm growing prematurely old with thinking. It's not what I'm accustomed to, and it's telling on me dreadfully." She pulled out a flimsy cambric handkerchief, and began to cry into it a little. "Yesterday morning, when I woke up after a sleepless night, and looked in my vanity glass I found a grey hair near my left temple," she sobbed. "And after that—you ask me whether I've f-forgotten."

"I'm a regular brute, I know," said the penitent Charles; "but the situation's far from jolly when you come to think of it. What with plotting, and planning, and hiding, and dodging, and pestering people to ask me to the houses where I'm most likely to meet you, my darling, I'm the most miserable dog alive!"

"Oh," cried Dolly, "how can you, after all I've done and borne for your sake? After submitting to be clandestinely and vulgarly married before a red-nosed registrar, to a man of whom my relations don't approve," she jumped up, and began to flutter up and down the long drawing-room like an indignant parrot; "he tells me to my very face that he's miserable."

"My own, my precious!—" began the wretched Charles.

"You shall have a divorce if you like," said Dolly, putting away the gossamer handkerchief with an air of stern determination, "and marry that red-haired Miss Crawley. I'll confess all to Aunt Caroline, and she can do what she likes with my twenty thousand pounds."

"I almost wish you would," returned the bridegroom gloomily. "I might stand a chance of getting a little of my own wife's society *then*."

Dolly came back and sat beside him.

"You know, my dear boy," she said maternally, "we ought to have waited—"

"Until you were twenty-one? I suppose we ought."

"Only you were so dreadfully jealous, and so awfully impatient, and after all," said the bride, "a twelvemonth did seem a long time to keep you dangling. And now that we have taken the step, we must make the best of it, and trust to Braun."

"That Braun is a clever woman, too clever, I sometimes think," said Charles. "Where on earth did your Aunt Caroline pick her up?"

"She came to England six months ago to find a friend, and the friend couldn't be found, and so," said Dolly, "she thought she would take a situation as nursery governess or lady's-maid. And her wages are low, and she knows a great deal about how you ought to treat your hair to prevent its tumbling out."

"Or," said Charles with a gleam of humour, "how you ought to tie it on to prevent its tumbling off."

"And she is extremely sympathetic—"

"She ought to be!" said Charles; "I've tipped her enough."

"And so have I; nearly all my quarterly allowance has gone in gagging her," said Dolly, "and what Aunt

Caroline will think when she finds I've spent all, and got nothing to show for it, I can't imagine."

"Don't let's talk of disagreeables when we have the good luck to be left alone together," implored Charles, repossessing himself of the tempting little waist.

A moment later Lady Baintree and Elizabeth came in, and found a bored and indifferent young lady and a stolid and unimpressionable young man seated as far asunder as the limits of the apartment would allow.

"Caroline allows her responsibility to prey upon her," said Lady Baintree afterwards. "She becomes morbid."

CHAPTER XIV

HYMEN UP-TO-DATE

THE Marquess of Rotherholme (late Royal Red Guards) son and heir to His Grace the Duke of Norchester, K.G."—to quote from the *Morning Post* of July 25th—"was married to Miss Elizabeth Colquhoun (eldest daughter of Captain the Hon. Grantly Colquhoun, late —th Dragoons), at St. George's, Hanover Square, at two o'clock. The church was beautifully decorated with palms, tree-fern, gladioli, lilies, and weeping roses, and the pillars were wreathed with smilax and trailing vines. Captain Charles Soper (Royal Red Guards) accompanied the Marquess of Rotherholme as best man. The bridesmaids were the Ladies Horatia and Evelina Milwall, cousins to the bridegroom, Miss Marietta Colquhoun, sister to the bride, Miss Dolly Garraway, and the Ladies Jane and Susan Colquhoun, the two younger daughters of Lord Rederdall. They wore Empire bandeaux with osprey aigrettes, and *tutu* overskirts of spangled chiffon over Napoline silk of pale sweet-pea pink. They carried tall white sticks with bunches of Malmaison carnations tied with white chiffon ribbon. They wore ruby heart brooches, with the initials of the bride and bridegroom entwined. A great many people came very late. A little later the bride entered the sacred edifice"—we are still quoting—"leaning on the arm of Pope Dollimore, Esq., M.P. The choir preceded the bridal procession

to the chancel, singing 'The Voice that breathed o'er Eden.' The Bishop of Philemmon, uncle to the bridegroom, performed the ceremony, assisted by the Rev. Adolphus Peck."

The bride shone starry through her divided veil of tulle and *point d'Alençon*. The bridal robe was in Empire style and her bandeaux were of diamonds—the gift of the bridegroom. Seven rows of priceless pearls—the Norchester pearls—heaved on her slight bosom. A garland of orange-blossoms gemmed with diamonds was attached to her bodice at the back, and fell to the hem of her train. Her bouquet was of orchids, orange-blossoms and white roses, the gift of the Duchess of Norchester (whose "venerable age and failing health prevented her from attending the ceremony, which also lacked the commanding presence of the Duke, owing to circumstances over which his Grace had, unfortunately, no control").

Lady Baintree afterwards welcomed the relations and immediate friends of the Marquess and Marchioness of Rotherholme at Chesterfield Gardens. The wide staircase had been festively carpeted with scarlet, and adorned with pot-plants and white flowers. The footmen were almost invisible behind huge breast-knots. Refreshments were dispensed at a buffet in the hall, and in the garden beneath an Arabian tent. The wedding-cake was both costly, colossal and symbolical in design. The Bohemian Gipsy Band and Chorus gratified the eye with their picturesque costumes, and the ear with their quaint dance-music.

"It is the prettiest wedding of the season," said Lady Caroline Wragge.

"I am so glad!" said Lady Baintree. "I was so pining to do the right thing!"

"And you have done it, Diana!" said Lady Caroline. Then she bent her towering bonnet, and whispered in the ear of her friend, "You have not forgotten to order your maid Pauline to remain in the room where the wedding presents are laid out?"

"My housekeeper is in charge," responded Lady Baintree.

"One should not be suspicious, of course," said Lady Caroline. "But in case a case of Apostle spoons and a case of kleptomania should come in contact—" She raised her eyebrows fatefully, and shivered in her rustling brocades.

"I have told Waite to be sure and remove the heels of all those satin slippers," resumed Lady Baintree. "I dare not run the risk of another painful accident like the last."

"You refer to what happened when Euphemia Bulberby married Dr. Crowther," said Lady Caroline. "How fortunate that he happened to be a medical man, and carried First Aid applications in his waistcoat pocket! But where is Elizabeth?"

"Elizabeth is upstairs in her room," said Lady Baintree. "She is a little upset, and has been crying."

"Very natural!" said Lady Caroline.

"It seems Captain Colquhoun telegraphed congratulations from the Continent. Such a sweet, fatherly message! No wonder it moved Elizabeth to tears."

"The man must have been mad to send a touching telegram," said Lady Caroline indignantly, "and give his own daughter pink eyelids and a red nose on her wedding day."

"She will change to her travelling gown before we see her again," intimated Lady Baintree. "I thought it best under the circumstances."

"You are a woman of infinite resource, Diana," said Lady Caroline. She looked about, spreading her arched nostrils and waving her lappets. "Where is my Dolly?" she asked with anxiety.

"She is sitting under the palm trees," said Lady Baintree, "with Captain Soper."

"Oh," groaned Lady Caroline. "That very undesirable person!"

"If you could see how she is snubbing him, my dear," said Lady Baintree, "you would quite pity him!"

A little comedy of humility on one side, and hauteur upon the other, was indeed being performed for the benefit of both ladies.

"Do you remember our wedding day?" the best man had whispered to the bridesmaid.

"Oh, don't I!" Dolly returned, lifting her pretty eyebrows. "How it poured with rain!"

"That registrar," said the best man, "was beastly familiar."

"When he pretended to take Braun for the bride, and treated me purely as a witness."

"Confound his impudence!" grumbled Charles. "He can't treat all the witnesses in that particular way."

"I think kissing," said Dolly, smoothing her chiffons, "amongst people of that class is quite a custom, don't you know?"

"I wish people of our class would adopt it!" interpolated Charles.

"After the horrid ordeal was over we went and breakfasted at a bun and cocoa shop," said Dolly, "be-

cause you thought the name over the door appropriate."

"Lockharts! So it was," returned Charles. "Darling!" he continued, with fervour, "if you'll drop your bouquet and stoop as though you were going to pick it up, I shall be able to squeeze your hand."

"Aunt Caroline's glasses are upon us!"

"Say something nice, then," pleaded Charles.

"I must look very haughty and indifferent in case Aunt Caroline—" Dolly favoured her better-half with an elaborately supercilious stare. "My pet!" she murmured, between lips primmed to indifference, "will that do?"

"It must," groaned Charles, "for the present. Look here! the garden is too public. Shall we creep into the conservatory? It's conveniently crowded with people who are eating ices, and I ought to be able to put my arm round your waist for half a second, if I have anything like luck."

"The room where the wedding presents are laid out," said Dolly demurely, "is thronged to suffocation."

"Let's go and look at the presents, then."

"There is a Salviati bowl I am quite dying to see," said Dolly, for the benefit of society at large.

"There are three gold-mounted dressing-cases," said Charles, "and a silver mandoline. If I'm more keen on one thing than another it's a silver mandoline. And your Aunt Caroline is talking to the Bishop. Let's run for it."

They ran.

"You surpassed yourself to-day," said Lady Caroline to the Bishop. "I never heard the Marriage Serv-

ice more pathetically read." Then she started and grasped the hand of Lady Baintree. "Diana," she hissed, "Dolly has disappeared!" . . .

Lady Baintree patted her friend smilingly.

"My dear," she said, "you agitate yourself unnecessarily. Dolly is with the Earl of Clashburnie. I see his hair—all the Farintolls have hair of that scarlet colour—close to her hat, in the refreshment buffet. Has not a little bird whispered to you my views with regard to—"

"Yes. But another little bird," said Lady Caroline, "is pecking at my Dolly's prospects. And if I am not to shake her, you must interfere."

"Of whom do you speak?"

"Of Elizabeth's younger sister. She has been in that young man's pocket, Diana, ever since we left the church."

"A mere child, who has not yet left boarding-school."

"In the interests of the other boarders," said Lady Caroline, with agitated bonnet feathers, "I should say that the sooner she does leave it the better. An arrant flirt, Diana, young as she is; an arrant flirt!"

"You pain me, Caroline!" . . . Lady Baintree broke off to extend both hands to Pope Dollimore, who approached at that moment, and murmured with a grateful glance, "How sweet of you to support this ordeal. Elizabeth will never forget your goodness!"

"You made a point," said Pope, "of my giving away the bride. Otherwise—" He heaved a dismal sigh, and the contrast between the festal gaiety of his attire and the funereal melancholy of his countenance was very great. He glanced about him; he shook his head

and sighed again. "Oh! my dear Diana," he murmured plaintively, "what memories are evoked by these surroundings. Six years ago I came down that staircase with Jane upon my arm."

"Never mind Jane now!" pleaded Lady Baintree. The flood of Pope's reminiscences was not to be stemmed.

"It is sixteen months to-day, Diana," he said, "since *that other* wedding. All the Westwood Witton Sunday School children—the girls I mean—walked in the procession. They wore white cotton frocks, and carried baskets of primroses, I think. . . . You said to me, 'I give you an ideal wife in Charlotte,' and the *decree nisi* was made absolute only the other day." He verged upon tragedy as he uttered in deep diaphragmatic tones, "I am not a man, Diana. I am a piece of human wreckage tossing upon the Ocean of Destiny!"

His china-blue eyes goggled; their whites were tinged with yellow. His very top-knot had lost its erect position. It hung limply—it shadowed a forehead lined with woe. Lady Baintree was penetrated with compassion.

"I cannot bear," she exclaimed, "to see you so despondent!"

"Have I cause to be otherwise, Diana?" Pope returned. "Were there a remedy for my present condition of mind, should I not take it? But there is no remedy."

"There is a remedy," broke from Lady Baintree. "Marry again!"

Pope almost bounded from the floor. "Diana!" he ejaculated. "You cannot be serious? Do you advise

me, in cool blood, to thrust my head into the noose for the third time?"

"Marriage," pronounced Lady Baintree, "is a blessed state."

"It is a blessed state!"

She took no notice of the equivoque. "Scripture recommends a man to leave his parents and cleave to his wife," she said, grasping at an authentic quotation.

"But in the case of the wife or wives preferring to cleave to other people?"

"Then the man must go on marrying until he finds the person appointed by Providence in the beginning of things to be his partner and helpmate," retorted Lady Baintree with spirit.

"If Providence had thoughtfully provided that person with a label," Pope responded with some animation, "it would, in my particular case, have saved a considerable amount of unpleasantness."

"She is labelled," said Lady Baintree with high conviction as an inspiration of so dazzling a nature that she was almost fain to stagger broke upon her.

The Earl of Clashburnie, a sallow, freckled youth of twenty, and Miss Marietta Colquhoun had emerged together from the conservatory.

Lady Baintree, still under the influence of her revelation, beckoned to the child. She smoothed the glittering waves of hair, not yet gathered from the dainty shoulders in a coil. She cooed maternally in the pink, shell-like ear, "Mr. Pope Dollimore would like to look at the wedding presents, love!"

Pope quailed visibly. "No, Diana," he protested, in hollow, quavering tones, "I would rather not!"

"Pope," said Lady Baintree sternly, "you are dying to see the wedding presents."

He made one more feeble effort at resistance, but the habit of obedience to Diana's behests, the hypnotic suggestion conveyed in her glance overcame. He drooped and yielded.

"Oh! please keep my bouquet for me, Lord Clashburnie, until I come back," said Midge, plying the archery of her bright eyes upon that callow peerling.

"That was of design!" hissed Lady Caroline, as Pope followed his young guide submissively upstairs.

Lady Baintree had only raised a deprecating hand, when belated thunder crashed at the hall-door. Two powdered footmen flew to answer the summons.

"It cannot be the carriage," uttered Lady Caroline.

"Impossible," responded Lady Baintree. "Some late arrival."

The new-comer was a tall man, correctly, but carelessly, dressed. He wore an indefinable air of being at home, as he looked about him. Lady Caroline turned her glasses upon him appraisingly.

"Military or diplomatic? Diplomatic, I should say. Dear me, I seem to recognise—"

But Lady Baintree interrupted her with a slight scream.

"It is my cousin, Hilary Warr!" she cried.

Warr caught his name, and saw his cousin.

"Diana, this is a great surprise."

"A surprise, certainly; but a delightful one. Have you dropped from a balloon? Why did you not cable to prepare us?"

"I had no chance; it was all a rush. I take my leave now instead of eighteen months later to oblige

another man who has a reason for remaining in the East. Besides, I have official business with which I need not bore you. How well you look."

"And you; but the bronzing makes you seem older. And—there, now I come to look at you—there is a good deal of grey in your hair. Climate, no doubt. When did you arrive?"

"I ran up by last night's express from Dover," said Warr, "after travelling by the Baku, St. Petersburg, Berlin and Paris route from my Consulate at Teheran. I woke up at my old chambers in Jermyn Street this morning, and my old landlord brought me the paper and some weak tea and burned toast, and a man I used to know met me on the doorstep, as I hailed a cab, and said, 'Hullo! here's Warr! Lend us a fiver, old chap!' And I am sorry to say I did!"

"You are not in the least changed," she uttered.

"Time has stood still in your case, Diana. I left you on the verge of a wedding; I find you in the middle of one. Tell me who the happy people are whom you have made miserable to-day?"

"Surely you know?"

"I know that the bridegroom has a handle to his name, and that is all."

"Have you not read the papers?"

"I couldn't settle down to them somehow."

"Has nobody mentioned—"

"I've not seen anybody to talk to yet—all my morning has been spent at the Foreign Office. Come, I'm dying of curiosity. Be merciful as you are strong!"

Lady Baintree yielded, smiling.

"The bridegroom," she said, "is the catch of the

season, the Marquess of Rotherholme. You knew him at college as Lord Richard Milwall."

"Yes, I knew him. But not for very long," said Warr. "His acquaintance cost too much—in the way of money and—"

"You were going to say—"

"Something else. But I pulled up in time."

"Men will never let bygones be bygones," sighed Lady Baintree. "Lord Rotherholme is now quite reformed."

"And calculated to make any woman happy?"

"Certainly."

"Well, who is the woman?"

Diana did not reply at once. Smart people began to gather on the landings and muster on the staircase and stream in from the garden. The hall was a sea of waving feathers and nodding flowers. Silk rustled, jewels tinkled; it was the hour of the triumph of the eternal feminine, and the male element retired into the background, as every woman present said, with one voice:

"Here she is!"

The bride appeared upon the upper landing, surrounded by a bevy of bridesmaids. A chorus rose. There were rapturous cries of admiration for the hat, sighs of ecstasy were heaved over the gown. Paris, of course! Every fold spoke the sacred word. Lady Caroline leaned to Lady Baintree. "Too sweet," she said; "but are you sure that chiffon won't crush?"

"It was guaranteed not to," said Lady Baintree. "But if it does, I'll never set foot in the Maison Lange again! How pale you look, Hilary."

"Do I?"

"The journey has fagged you," said Lady Baintree. "Come, let me introduce you to Lady Rotherholme." She moved towards the foot of the staircase as Elizabeth came slowly down. "I meant to surprise you," Diana said over her shoulder. "I knew that you had met before."

"Yes," said Warr, with an odd cracked note in his voice, "we have met before."

He looked straight at the beautiful, pale woman in the filmy grey gown, the grey hat with towering plume. The odour of champagne and flowers was sickening in his nostrils,—the whole place seemed widening and contracting, heaving and pitching. . . . One moment the scene would fade and grow dim, the next rush upon his consciousness with a vividness almost unbearable. But one figure, one face never faded or wavered, but always remained steady and distinct—Elizabeth's.

As she set her foot upon the last step of the staircase she saw him. For one moment she stood petrified; she could not drag her eyes away. Then she bowed a cold little bow of semi-recognition. The gay noisy crowd closed upon and swallowed her. Warr stood upon its outskirts silent and alone.

CHAPTER XV

RICE AND SLIPPERS

MY dearest child," Lady Baintree whispered, "you are not overcome? To faint in that gown would be madness."

"Do not alarm yourself, Diana!" Elizabeth proudly reared her head, crowned with Maria Jackson's latest confection. The tall dove-coloured plume topped a face that was pale but composed.

Lady Baintree heaved a sigh of relief, and beckoned to Pope Dollimore.

"It is time to cut the cake. Where is Lord Rotherholme?" she said rapidly, in the hostess's undertone.

"Can't you manage without him?" Pope whispered.

"If absolutely necessary, yes; but the bridegroom should be present. It is customary on these occasions."

"I fancy he went up to change about an hour ago. I heard him tell his valet to take the liqueur brandy and some potass up to his dressing-room."

"Poor fellow! I daresay he needed it," said Lady Baintree maternally.

"He had already had a considerable quantity of champagne," Pope hinted.

A shade of anxiety darkened Diana's brow.

"Could you not go up and see?" she began, but the sentence was broken short upon the appearance of the butler.

The man wore a perturbed countenance. He beck-

oned Pope aside and whispered in his ear. The two went upstairs together. Lady Baintree gave the signal and the cake was cut. During the performance of the rite the bride exhibited a composure quite remarkable.

"A survival of barbaric custom," observed the Bishop of Philemmon, as the salvers circulated. He beamed apostolically across a large triangular fragment of the hymeneal delicacy. He bent to Lady Caroline, saying with the gentle condescension which sits well upon the erudite: "We get it from the Druids."

"I thought," said Lady Caroline, "I heard Busvine mentioned?"

Warr's intent glance had not strayed from the waving dove-coloured feather, the knot of dead-leaf hair, now the central flower in a bouquet of smart headgear. Outside the charmed feminine circle the men were gathered, stiff-collared, shiny-headed, well-bred, wearing the air of depression usually prominent at weddings, and which no amount of champagne can totally dispel. Across the barrier Warr's eyes encountered Elizabeth's. He moved forward; the crowd swayed and parted. In another moment they had met.

He said, "You must be already wearied with friendly congratulations, Lady Rotherholme, or I would add mine to the rest."

The artificiality of the speech displeased him. He would have given much to be as easy and natural, distant and different as she seemed when she said:

"So many thanks!" And settled down, as lightly as a bird, upon a settee, and drew the folds of her thin dress aside with a slight, cool gesture of invitation.

"It is ages since we met," she went on.

"Ages!" returned Warr.

"You have spent the time abroad?"

"I have been in Persia. I am," said Warr, "a kind of consul out at Teheran, you know."

"I saw your appointment in *The Times*," said Elizabeth, buttoning her glove. "Have you been in England long?"

"Twenty hours."

"Do you," she asked, "find Persia particularly interesting?"

Warr, with a faint reflection of her manner and tone, replied:

"Immensely so!"

"I am so glad," said Elizabeth, "that you are happy there."

"It has not exactly been a whirl of gaiety," Warr answered with a faint irrepressible tinge of resentment in his tone. "The famine—you may have read of it in the newspapers—has reached a fearful height; no rain has fallen in the southern districts for a year; the people are dying like poisoned rats. It is that I might carry out some arrangements in connection with the Relief Fund that I have taken early leave, and, as things stand, I must return quite soon."

"Indeed?" Elizabeth said, with a faint accent of well-bred interest.

"Your time has been agreeably occupied, no doubt," said Warr, ineffectually trying to keep the note of personal injury and smothered chagrin out of his voice.

"My time? Oh yes," she said, "I have not had a moment."

"In which to recall absent friends," said Warr, giv-

ing up the attempt to be indifferent, "or answer their letters."

"If I possess one virtue," said Elizabeth, "it is that of being a good correspondent. I invariably answer letters."

"You did not," said Warr, "answer mine!"

Elizabeth lifted her eyes to his. Until that moment his had not met them fully.

"You never wrote to me!"

"I did," returned Warr hoarsely. "A fortnight after we said good-bye at Cannes I wrote to you from Vienna."

There was a pause, then Elizabeth said weakly:

"Where—where was the letter sent? Because when I—"

"When you dismissed me," said Warr, "you did not encourage the idea of any future correspondence. You forbade me even to write. But circumstances had altered with me for the better, and I hoped—I dreamed—perhaps against my clearer sense, that you—"

His voice broke and died away. The empty society chatter round them sounded in his ears like the buzzing of a swarm of wasps. He clenched his hand upon his knee, and saw the glove split, and the tanned skin of his hand show against the grey kid with dull interest. He had bought those gloves only that morning in the Haymarket on his way to the Foreign Office. Only that morning seemed a good many weeks ago.

But Elizabeth was speaking.

"Where," she said again, "did you send the letter?"

He looked up. A gleam of gold, a flash of rose, caught his eye, a *mignonne* laughing face upturned coquettishly.

"To Brighton," he said, "to the care of your little sister—'Magnall House, Cedar Grove.' I thought that she would have sent it on to you."

"If she did," returned Elizabeth—"I never received it!"

Warr heard himself echoing "Never received it!" And when after another pause Elizabeth said, "She may have lost it!" he repeated, "She may have lost it," in the same mechanical, parrot-like way.

"Yes! she must have lost it!" said Elizabeth, sending her eyes across the room in search of Midge's flower-like, innocent face.

"Would it have made," said Warr, as though speaking to himself, "would it have made any difference if she had not?"

Elizabeth did not answer. Then there was a general bustle and looking round. People were smiling, beckoning, thrusting gloved hands into silver and porcelain bowls of rice. The hall door was open, there was a glimpse of striped awning, of red baize, of shabby on-lookers kept in check by policemen, a great array of smart automobiles and chauffeurs with bouquets and wedding favours.

Warr rose and held out his hand. She gave him hers. She was marble-pale, and the hand felt cold and heavy as marble in his clasp.

"With all my heart I wish you happiness!" he said very gently.

Elizabeth answered with some difficulty, "I know you speak the truth." Then her hand dropped out of Warr's like a dead thing and the crowd of smart people closed in, and there was a storm of kissing. Warr had a vision of Elizabeth enfolded by Lady Baintree—of

Elizabeth embracing her sister—of Elizabeth going out at the door in a hailstorm of rice and farewells upon the arm of a shortish man in an excessively well-cut suit of tweeds, whose baldish head was covered with a soft felt hat when he stepped after Elizabeth into a great grey landau-limousine. One of the bridegroom's presents to the bride, people said. And then—the great grey car was gone; and Diana was hysterical, surrounded by all her dearest friends, who were begging her to keep up. . . . And then there was a blank, and Warr found himself hatted and outside in the fresh air, walking quickly down Chesterfield Gardens with Pope Dollimore at his elbow.

“It has been a trying day, my dear Warr,” said Pope, “but it is over now. Will you come to the Club and smoke, and dine afterwards, or have you an engagement?”

Warr had an engagement, and went away alone, very quickly, and without looking round.

CHAPTER XVI

SEMI-CONFIDENCES

WHEN you dropped upon me so suddenly the other day," said Lady Baintree to Warr, "the first idea that flashed across my mind was, 'He has found existence in Persia insupportable without a wife and he has come home to get one!' But I am doomed always to disappointment—in your case. And yet I have never for an instant credited your pretence of being a man of marble. You are affectionate! You have a heart!" Warr winced at the phrase. "You could be very much in love. I believe one day you will discover that you are."

"I made that discovery a good many months ago, Diana," said Warr, yielding to an impulse of confidence, urged by the desire for sympathy.

"Before you went out to Persia," said Lady Baintree, with intense conviction. "Yes, I always thought there was some hidden motive for your burying yourself after that fashion. And I was right. Did I know her? Tell me her husband's name!"

"Why should people always take it for granted that the object of an unhappy attachment must always belong to somebody else?"

"I beg your pardon, but as things go now. . . . Where did you meet?"

"On the Continent," said Warr slowly. "She—she was travelling with her people. And at Cannes we

went for some walks—you know those cliff-walks about Cannes?—and the sunsets were particularly fine—and one of them got into my head; and I made what people in penny novels call a declaration.”

“I always said you would meet your affinity.”

“There was a remarkable similarity in our conditions,” said Warr, with an odd smile. “We were both beggars. Beggars who eat a decent dinner every day, and wear neat boots, and never have their gloves cleaned more than twice, and sometimes ride on horseback, and generally have a taxi-fare in their pockets, are common enough. Society swarms with them, only Charity Commissioners and Boards of Guardians ignore them; and, as a rule, the mendicants are a cheerful class of beings, who only remember that their pockets are inconveniently empty when their hearts are inconveniently full.”

“She *did* care about you then?” hinted Lady Baintree.

“Oh, yes, she did,” returned Warr. There were some Niphetos roses in a Delft jardinière upon a table near. He took one, and twisted it in his fingers slowly. “I know she did,” he went on, looking at the rose. “We both made the concession to Nature of being very much in love, but otherwise we were very high-handed with the old lady. We agreed that—it—could never come to anything; that there were plenty of paupers in the world already; that—*her* duty to herself and her family required that she should marry a man whose income would not fit into a sovereign-purse; and that there was nothing left for us to do but to say ‘good-bye’ as pleasantly as possible.”

The rose, which had been twirling rapidly, knocked

smartly against the edge of the table. Its decapitated head fell to the floor.

"See what you have done to that poor flower!" said Lady Baintree. "She must have been an extremely sensible girl!"

"She was wonderfully sensible. I used to think that you would like her," Warr returned.

"How," queried Lady Baintree, "did you part?"

"Quite conventionally," said Warr, with a dry smile. "She promised always to regard me as a brother, or an uncle—I forget which; and I didn't promise anything. I was very sore—for a week or so—you see."

"Naturally. But you acknowledged that everything had turned out for the best?"

"Not quite. I was in that frame of mind, you know," said Warr, picking up his broken rose and smelling it, "when a cottage could hardly have been too small. And I was suffering from an exaggerated sense of my own general importance. It had seemed delightful, but natural, on the whole, that she should care about me. It seemed altogether painful, and altogether unnatural, that her heart should close, as a sensitive coral star-flower does when a finger touches it, when poverty breathed upon its living petals. And then there came Lord Holbury's letter, with the offer of the Consulship, and I"—(he reddened and bit his lip)—"I was enough in love to try my luck again." He rose and walked to the window. "I wrote her a letter," he said. "I told in it everything that there was to tell. I spoke out with my pen as I had never spoken with my mouth. I found gold and frankincense to offer her—her to whom I had given nothing but scentless flowers and bright pebbles; I poured out my

heart at her feet. If ever a love-letter was written, that was one!"

"And the answer?"

"The answer never came. By some odd freak of destiny, the letter never reached her," said Warr, without turning round.

"And?"

"And so—she married somebody else."

"Is she happy?"

"Please God!" said Warr, "she will not be unhappy!"

"And you never meet?"

"We have never met but once since. But, who knows? I may encounter her in the Park, and bow and pass on. Perhaps I shall call upon her, and she will pour me out weak tea, and I shall be glad when I get up to go, and so will she; and when I am gone, she will remember that my hair was beginning to get thin on the top, and I shall have noticed that she had powder on. It is an unmistakable proof that a woman is dead to you when you notice the powder—"

"It is a curious fact that a person being dead to one," said Lady Baintree, delicately dusting her profile with her handkerchief, "that a person's being dead to one, should only mean that he or she is very much alive to somebody else. You are coming down to Westwood for the First of September?"

"If I may presume to ask to be informed," said Warr, "as to the names, ages, weights, and conditions of your other guests. You will remember that I am a public character, and grow particular."

"There will be Lady Caroline Wragge and her niece," said Lady Baintree, checking off upon her

rings, "a sweet girl with whom you will be charmed, and—"

"Do the Rotherholmes join your house-party?"

"I had expected it," said Lady Baintree, "for they are to return from the Continent on the twentieth of August. But Elizabeth writes me that Lord Rotherholme has set his heart on staying at their place near Doncaster until the St. Leger is over. So much depends on personal attention in sporting matters, and he has a mare in training for the Stakes. What a perfect character he is!"

"He used to be a character," Warr replied, "as I remember him."

"Then," said Lady Baintree, hurriedly reverting to the subject of the house-party, "there will be the Delamoors and the Polers, the Earl of Clashburnie, such a nice, simple young man; Pope Dollimore—I know you will be pleased to hear that; an extra bachelor or two, and Elizabeth's younger sister, a sweet, simple child, whom you perhaps have noticed. She is staying with me here at present, and Pope has been so good as to take her to Madame Tussaud's to-day. We leave town for Westwood to-morrow, and— Hush! I think I hear them!"

Warr's half-uttered query was nipped in the bud by the entrance of Pope and Midge.

"We have been," said Pope, "to the Waxworks."

He fanned his moist brow with a vividly-hued silk handkerchief, and sank into a chair.

"And we saw everything!" cried Midge, tossing back the gold-red waves.

"Consider that statement as italicised, my dear Warr," murmured Pope in a tone only meant for

Hilary's ear. "We saw *everything*! The morbid curiosity of excessive youth, its relish for hideousness, and its appetite for horrors, is an extraordinary mystery."

He was pale and waxy in complexion. There was no doubt of his having been upset.

"You don't look well," said Warr.

"I never was a good sailor," said Pope, "and yesterday I was obliged to ride upon the elephant at the Zoological Gardens. The animal's method of progress is much the same as that of a Channel steamer in a gale, and is attended, in my case at least, with unpleasant results."

"I think you have met with my little friend before, Hilary," said Lady Baintree, maternally tapping Midge's dimpled chin.

"Oh, we knew Mr. Warr at Cannes—ages ago," said Midge, with her high, sweet little laugh, "when I was quite a little girl in short frocks. And when I saw him on Elizabeth's wedding-day I knew him at once, in spite of his having grown so much older."

"Did you ever again have tea with the Vicomte's mamma?" asked Warr, smiling in spite of himself.

"No," said Midge, shaking her gay little head. "For they turned out dreadfully—there was something queer about them—and people began to say such awful things. I thought it best to look the other way when Alphonse bowed to me, because, as Lady Baintree says, 'undesirable acquaintances are more easily made than got rid of.' Lady Baintree always says such clever things, doesn't she?"

"Little goose!" said the flattered lady. "Run and take your hat off, and then come down and make tea for me."

"She is perfectly unsophisticated," said Lady Baintree, as Midge fluttered to her hostess, bestowed a humming-bird kiss, and danced out of the room.

"She hardly conveys that impression to me," said Warr. The expression of his cousin's eyebrows instantly conveyed to him the fact that he had said the wrong thing. He glanced at Pope, who had fallen into a doze, haunted, perhaps, by visions from the Chamber of Horrors. He looked back at Lady Baintree. He understood.

"You don't mean—" he began.

"I am strongly in favour," she whispered, "of Pope's re-marriage. You will understand that in the matter of his third selection, my credit is involved. Hush, he is waking! Do not remain now; I must speak to him alone."

Warr obeyed, and went away.

"Pope," said Lady Baintree, with earnestness as consciousness revived, and the recumbent one sat up, "have you said anything definite to-day?"

"Diana," Pope began, "I must protest—"

"It is I who protest," said Diana. "I will not have the affections of an inexperienced child trifled with. I refuse to—"

"Diana," said Pope, ruthlessly for him, "this is nonsense. I have not trifled with anybody's affections. I have simply spent this afternoon, as I have spent a great many others, in the company of a young lady, who does not take the trouble to disguise from me that she considers me a dull companion. Nor can I bring myself to regard her in any other light than that of a pert school-girl."

"She is a mere child, it is true," said Lady Baintree

with feeling, "but you would form her. She does not know the difference between a man and a dancing-master; but is not that an obvious advantage? Pope, you have always been guided by my opinion, ever since you were a boy in knickerbockers and I a girl in short frocks—"

"You looked very well in them, Diana!" Pope said softening to the recollection.

"Then, if only for the sake of those old days, promise me to do as I have asked."

"Won't she think it queer?" Pope hesitated.

"Of course I've carefully prepared her for the surprise. And it will be over in a moment."

"I have heard a dentist," said Pope, "make precisely the same remark."

CHAPTER XVII

A CLOUD FROM THE CONTINENT

BEFORE the rice-cloud had burst and the happy pair had driven away from Chesterfield Gardens, the expectant bridegroom, in the seclusion of his dressing-room, had sought counsel of Pope Dollimore.

"Outside will you?" said Lord Rotherholme, addressing his valet. That grave and respectable individual retired, and his master addressed himself to Pope. "I'm in a hat," he said, rather thickly, "and I want you to help me out. This girl I've made my wife, she—she's a lady, you see—"

"Of that fact," returned Pope rather stiffly, "no one who had ever met Lady Rotherholme could fail to be aware."

"Thoroughbred," said the happy man. "Racin' stock, pedigree unimpeachable. Trained in a good stable, though she doesn't carry any weight of metal, eh?"

"Undoubtedly," assented Pope.

"I've not seen much of her, you know," asserted the joyful bridegroom, "but enough to judge that she carries her head high. Not but what pride is in place where my name and my family are concerned; that's all right, and I don't complain." He squinted anxiously in the toilet glass as he knotted his necktie with hands that were not steady, and went on. "Still, when it comes to being alone with her—I've hardly ever

been alone with her, now that I come to think of it—I don't deny but what I feel a trifle nervous." He helped himself to the liqueur-brandy with reckless generosity, and continued, "Look here. We're goin' abroad, as the usual thing under the circumstances."

"Aix-les-Bains is the destination, I believe?" said Pope.

"It ain't half a bad place for abroad," said Rotherholme, "and you can do a flutter at the pigeon-shootin' and lose a few thick un's at the Casino while you're improvin' your tone with the waters. But what I meant to say was this. I suppose—in the beginnin', she, my wife, you know—she'll expect me to pay her a good deal of attention. I shall have to sit with her, walk with her, drive with her, talk to her, amoose her, pay her compliments and so forth, eh?"

"Such *petits soins* are—usual—in—er—parallel cases."

Rotherholme's countenance palpably fell. "It's a noosance," he said thoughtfully. "To tell the truth, I'm out of the runnin' when it comes to talkin' to ladies who *are* ladies. With the other sort, you know, it's a different pair o' shoes."

"It is," replied Pope with a flash of inspiration, "and that is why you had better change your boot-maker."

At this juncture the conversation ended.

A fortnight later Lady Baintree at Westwood received a letter with the Aix postmark from one of the dearest and most confidential of her battalion of friends.

"The Rotherholmes," she wrote, "are among recent arrivals. We met them yesterday at the Grottoes of

St. Paul. How handsome she is, but so *distract* and pale. Neither she nor Lord Rotherholme seemed to take any oppressive degree of interest in the Alum Springs. However, he seemed to have regained his spirits in the evening, when we encountered him with some friends at the Casino, where play seems to be running high, and the company is, as usual, more showy than select.

My dear, you know best, but what an odd union!
However, as I said before, no doubt you know best.
Devotedly, FREDERICA."

Lady Baintree tore up the letter in an access of annoyance. She would have liked to tear up her devoted Frederica along with it. Midge, curled up upon the cretonne-covered sofa of the morning-room in company with a book, saw her hostess's handsome black eyebrows drawn together in a frown of annoyance. Lady Baintree, looking up from the deed of destruction, met the child's clear observant glance.

"What are you reading, my sweetest?" Then, as Midge with charming compliance held up the volume, so that the title inscribed in large gilt letters upon its back might be conveniently read, "'Carlyle's History of the French Revolution,'" Lady Baintree exclaimed. "My child, I should call that heavy literature for the holidays."

"Perhaps," the little one said, showing her pretty teeth. "But these aren't the regular holidays, you know!" She slipped out of her comfortable nest upon the sofa and tripped lightly towards the door.

"You have dropped a little book out of your 'Carlyle,'

darling," Lady Baintree said, pointing to a thin, paper-covered volume that had fallen upon the floor.

"Oh, so I have! How funny! Why, it must have been there all the time I was reading about poor Marie Antoinette and the Diamond Necklace," cried Midge. "And what a queer, queer title, 'The Kreutzer Sonata'! Kreutzer is a penny, in German, or a halfpenny, isn't it? Please, is it improving, and may I read it, Lady Baintree?"

Lady Baintree prohibited perusal. It is only due to Midge to say that she bore the disappointment with the sweetest grace in the world.

CHAPTER XVIII

ELIZABETH REFLECTS

MEANWHILE, Elizabeth sat thinking. It does not need to put all her thoughts into words. There is a broad winding walk down the wooded slopes of Tresserve,—there are several, but the one I mean is the pleasantest of all. Her carriage waited out of sight beyond the ridge that shuts out Aix from view of the Lac du Bourget, a feature of the scenery with which Lamartine has bored us to distraction, but which does not bore when one walks upon its shores, or gazes from afar over its deep waters, blue as sapphire, peeping from the rusty brownish matrix of the land.

Elizabeth sat upon a rustic bench under a group of browning chestnuts. She wore a lovely hat and a gown from the Maison Lange. She was too much dressed, one might have said. But she had left it to her maid to apparel her, and that attendant had brought forth from one of Elizabeth's regiment of colossal dress-baskets those garments which seemed most goodly in her own eyes.

To have shut a door—a door with a spring-lock which may never yield to the imperious need of any hand but death's, between oneself and hope,—the consciousness of this, one would think, must be a poignant thing. But in nine cases out of ten it is not. There is a dull ache perhaps, but mind and body are torpid. Little things, the passing of a bird's shadow over sun-

lit grass; the creeping of a caterpillar over rough tree-bark; the whiteness of one's own hand as it lies listlessly in one's lap—of these one may be keenly conscious. The great ill is out of sight, the great agony is out of feeling. A woman with a broken heart may be, almost invariably is, appreciative of her dinner. She from whom death has reft the friend of her love, the child of her heart, may yield to a perfectly genuine feeling of annoyance at the imperfect fit of her mourning-gown. One may stand upon the edge of an unbroken desert of desolate years to come,—one may know in one's soul that the journey through that burning wilderness will be guarded by no sheltering cloud, lighted by no pillar of fire; the burning thirst for sympathy, for love, will be assuaged by no living waters trickling from the rock,—and at the same time one may laugh at a small joke, join willingly in a pleasure-excursion, applaud a dancer's caperings before the footlights; and take an interest, quite sincere, in the result of a half-crown sweepstake.

To know that one has made a grievous mess of life, and to go on living, is the commonest thing in the world. Daily habits, ordinary interests, ordinary occurrences, are the anæsthetic agents that dull the anguish which otherwise would be unbearable. The beauty-loving eyes of Elizabeth's body drank in the lovely landscape. The vision of her soul stared ghastly over a dismal marsh, whence fever-exhalations rose, where bones of perished travellers lay upheaved upon the quaking slime, an offence in the face of day. But the slopes before her were gorgeous with the splendour of waning summer, and the Jura gleamed out white-capped against a background of lordly blue.

And she who sat there was a great lady, the bearer of a great title, no longer penniless Elizabeth, but rich Elizabeth. The famous Norchester pearls—seven rows, and a clasp set with an historical brilliant—occupied a velvet compartment in her jewel-case. Elizabeth was conscious of a pleasurable thrill when the smooth cold shining splendours lay against her white throat. She was far from being dead to the pleasure of possessing historical pearls. Yes, she had everything in the world she wanted, besides a jointure of three thousand pounds a year—she who had dismissed Hilary Warr because he had only seven hundred all told. Her body sat there under the chestnuts, well-fed, beautifully clad, prosperous, the cage of a stormy heart, of a tortured soul. Who giveth? ordinarily the world, commonly the flesh, occasionally the devil. Heaven very rarely bestows this woman in marriage upon *the man*.

CHAPTER XIX

HOSPITALITY

THE September house-party at Westwood was comprehensive without being large. Its components have already been mentioned. They were such as were well adapted to mingle beneath the mild, but imperative, pestle of Lady Baintree into an harmonious whole. "Overcrowding one's house," said the lady of Westwood, "means that married people have to sleep in the rooms of single people, the single people have to squeeze into servants' rooms, while the servants are compressed into cupboards. This creates a state of feeling which reacts. A discontented maid will prejudice her mistress; a valet labouring under a grievance will infect his master with his own ill-will before twenty-four hours are over. Besides, we are expressly commanded in Scripture to attend to the comforts of our domestics as solicitously as we minister to our own. I go further; I superintend their amusements. Regularly, three times in the year, I give orders for a Servants' Ball."

"I comprehend now," said Hilary Warr, "why I have encountered so many baskets of cut flowers and branches of evergreens in the passages and upon the staircases, and why fragments of cut tinsel paper and small replicas of the Union Jack generally pervade the atmosphere. When does the affair take place, Diana?"

"On the sixth."

"A large number of guests expected?"

"County tenants and the domestics of county friends, besides those of our own household, without numbering ourselves,—I should say about two hundred."

"You will give supper?"

"Certainly. I do not agree with muzzling the ox—"

"That treadeth on your corns! I beg your pardon, Diana. I had no intention of irreverence."

"I did not accuse you."

"No, but you looked severity. I thought it best to anticipate the rebuke."

"It is true I had intended to speak to you seriously—"

"You are so much more delightful when you are not serious."

"Hilary, with whom were you strolling in the shrubbery last night, after dinner?"

"With your little *protégée*, Lady Rotherholme's younger sister."

"What were you dreaming of?"

Hilary knew; but he said with his own mellow laugh, "Your *chef's* handiwork. The apotheosis of the partridge is a well-cooked *salmi*."

Lady Baintree's eyebrows became portentous.

"Do not fence with me, Hilary! I ask you again what were you thinking of? What could you have been thinking of?"

"Diana, you are turning a nursery-rhyme into a tragedy in hexameters. The gist of the whole is this. I had dined well. It was a fine—even a lovely night. I smoked a cigar in your shrubbery—and a pretty little girl helped me. There you have it!"

"Hilary, be warned! You know what you have said about genteel beggars."

"Well?"

"That child is one of them," said Lady Baintree. "She has not one halfpenny to rub against another!"

Hilary Warr pulled his crisp beard, and looked his cousin in the eyes, a twinkle of amusement playing in his own.

"Why should she want to rub halfpennies?"

"It is merely a colloquialism. Hilary, if I could see you comfortably married and settled, I should be content, I believe—"

"To give up the matrimonial business for good and all! I wish you would, Diana," said Warr, with a deeper note of earnestness mingling with his lighter tones. "I wish to Heaven you had before!"

But Lady Baintree, with the Sibylline gaze known to him of old, was already looking through her cousin, into a possible future of matrimonial felicity.

"Dolly Garraway is a sweet girl."

"I thought you were talking about Miss Colquhoun."

"I was; but Dolly pushed her out of my head," said Diana. "I never before saw a possibility so plainly as I do now, at this moment. Why should you—why should you not? Old Mr. Garraway was a brewer, it is true; but her mother was a Wragge. The Wragges, you know, are a branch of the Tollebiches of Beaumanoir. And Dolly will have twenty thousand pounds on the day she is of age."

"Well?"

"Hilary, if you have any sense of proper feeling, you will take my advice," said Lady Baintree, "and take that girl into the conservatory after dinner to-night."

Her voice was a thrill, her look a spur to effort. "Say you want to show her my Night-blooming *Cereus Splendidus* from Mexico. September is its month—it opens from seven to twelve regularly."

"Like a sort of floral night-club!"

"Say that you want to show her my *Cereus Splendidus*, and I'll aid and abet you, even though it be a treachery to Caroline, who is counting upon my getting her the Earl of Clashburnie as a nephew."

"That sandy Scotch boy with freckles?"

"Sandy or not sandy, freckled or not freckled, he will be the greatest catch of next season. Promise me, Hilary, promise me to remember the Night-blooming—"

"Your Night-blooming *Cereus* is a Venus's fly-trap, Diana!" said Hilary Warr.

CHAPTER XX

RUMOURS

WHAT is this I gather, Braun," asked Lady Caroline Wragge of her maid, "of a report of a ghost, an apparition, having been seen in the bachelors' wing?"

Braun, who was at the other end of the room, curling her mistress's hair, looked up with rounded eyes of alarm and wonder.

"Ghosts, Miladi?"

She was a stout, round-faced, good-looking young woman, with a great display of yellow tresses, fashionably arranged. You saw her dressed in a well-fitting grey alpaca gown and black stuff apron. In the intricacies of the toilette she was well versed, possessed of a light hand, an inventive genius, and thoroughly competent to undertake and carry out such repairs as may be understood to be necessary in the case of a mistress well past the Rubicon of fifty.

"The rumour floats," said Lady Caroline, "and I wished to know whether it was current in the servants' hall. None of Lady Baintree's domestics have been alarmed?"

Braun was sure if they had she would have heard of it. She grew pale, and pressed a plump hand to the left side of her well-filled corset, and declared that the mere hint of such a thing as a ghost was insupportable to her; she should never be able, she assured her gra-

cious lady, to traverse the corridors alone in future. Lady Caroline, whose prophetic mind grasped possibilities of deafness to the midnight-rung bell of a mistress with nerves excruciated by the visit of some indefinite bugaboo, was sorry she had spoken. She asked after her niece. Miss Dolly Garraway had, it appeared, risen with the lark, breakfasted with the same bird, and taken the governess-cart for a drive with Miss Marietta Colquhoun to some point of interest in the neighbourhood. The deed was excusable. Abbeys, especially in ruins, are highly instructive. The younger gentlemen, it appeared, had already gone with the guns. The coverts ran in a diametrically opposite direction to the road which must be traversed by the governess-cart.

"And now," said Lady Caroline, "to refer to yourself. I received you into my employment at a moment of stress, without references, and upon trial. I find you satisfactory in every respect." She glanced in the pier-glass. "Therefore, it is with no ulterior motive of dispensing with your attendance that I ask you whether you have found your friend—I allude to the female relative in search of whom you very imprudently, considering the kind of things which continually happen in large cities, came to London?"

"Miladi," Braun sighed, and dried a tear, "I haf not, *ach nein!* I haf not found her. That dearest heart's friend is to me lost, I haf moch fear. But since yesterday I write to my broder in Chairmany—and say, 'But for Miladi who so goot is, so benevolently Heaven-kind, I should haf despair.'"

"I am sorry to ask a question which has caused you pain," said Lady Caroline.

"Miladi may as many questions ask," said Braun, "as Miladi pleases. It is all gootness on the part of Miladi. I tell my broder in Chairmany so, efery time I write!"

"You seem very much attached to your family, Braun," remarked Lady Caroline approvingly.

The excellent Braun admitted the fact, and left the room.

She turned her footsteps, short and rather waddling ones, to the sleeping-chamber occupied by Miss Dolly Garraway. She entered the room, locked the door, and took the precaution to hang a towel over the door-handle. Then she improvised a platform out of an ottoman and a small chair, and mounted with some degree of activity upon the latter. A tall, old-fashioned wardrobe, with a carved border of mahogany scroll-work, was the object of her attention. Standing on tiptoe, she dipped her plump hand over the edge of the scroll work, and drew from concealment a brown paper parcel. With this she descended to the floor.

The parcel contained several quite ordinary objects. There was a loose cloak or wrapper of grey nun's veiling. There was a long white veil of *crêpe de Chine*, a fabric diaphanous enough to suit the most particular of ghosts, and there were a miniature pair of noiseless felt slippers. These articles the faithful Braun examined narrowly, with the paper in which they had been enveloped, and finding by the condition of some private mark that they had not been meddled with, she made a parcel of them as before, returned the parcel carefully to the original hiding-place, and descended to

the servants' hall, armed with the consciousness of integrity.

Meanwhile, the governess-cart was jogging behind a small but obstinate pony in the direction of the Abbey. For the first few miles its occupants were rather silent, perhaps because the day bore promise of turning out a warm and sleepy one. Perhaps some somnolent influence in the air caused Dolly to take a wrong turning, for before the pony had trotted another mile the cracking of the busy guns in Lady Baintree's coverts broke with revived distinctness upon the hearing of his passengers, and a hundred yards of continued advance presented to view the personality of Captain Charles Soper, sitting astride upon a stile of the hog-backed variety, and apparently enjoying the view.

He was astonished to incoherence at the unexpected encounter, and Dolly's consternation upon finding that her imperfect knowledge of the neighbourhood had brought the governess-cart by a diagonal route, almost, to the point of starting, was a little overdone. Midge tossed her hair back from her innocent blush-rose face, and showed her little teeth merrily.

"I *thought* we were going wrong when the road began to go up instead of dipping down," she cried, "but I didn't like to contradict an older person, and Dolly seemed as sure as sure!"

"I was told to keep a hill with a clump of elms on the top on my right hand all the way," said Dolly, "but there are so many hills with clumps of elms in this neighbourhood, aren't there, Captain Soper?"

CHAPTER XXI

LOVE IN THE STUBBLE

AND we have got our luncheon with us, too," cried Midge childishly, "in a basket under the seat, and corn for 'Tats' in a bag."

Luncheon could be eaten anywhere, Captain Soper was of opinion. Dolly demurely agreed. There was a strip of plantation upon the other side of the stubble-field to which the hog-backed stile belonged. The pony could not jump the stile, handicapped with the governess-cart and the luncheon, but he could go through the gate unless it should happen to be padlocked. It did not happen to be padlocked, curiously enough. "Tats" jogged demurely over the blazing stubble towards the shady coppice in view. Midge, being generally averse to unnecessary pedestrianism, remained in the cart, while Captain Charles Soper and Miss Garraway brought up the rear. The couple lagged a good deal, and talked earnestly in whispers.

"You always have so much to say to each other, haven't you?" Midge innocently remarked. "Perhaps you are writing a novel together—collab—what do they call it? Everybody writes novels nowadays, I think!"

It was a plentiful luncheon. Considering that the caterer had provided for two, it might have been termed copious. There were cold game, cold ham, salad, pâté and meringues, grapes and claret. Perhaps

the oddest thing was that a bottle of Heidsieck nestled snugly in a corner of the hamper. "As if young ladies were in the habit of drinking champagne in the morning," Midge virtuously remarked. She sipped upon pressure. Her eyes sparkled, her cheeks glowed, her curly locks vibrated with innocent animal spirits and childish enjoyment. She was the only member of the trio who seemed thoroughly happy, for Dolly appeared pale and abstracted, and Captain Soper was distinctly glum.

Perhaps it was the sultry September heat, the drowsy whirring of the crickets in the stubble, or a natural desire to enhance the picturesqueness of the scene, that made Midge fall sound asleep, with her pink cheek pillowed upon a tuft of bracken, and her straw hat tilted over her dainty little nose.

"She's off," remarked Captain Soper in a careful aside, at the first deep sigh that stole from between the sleeper's rosy parted lips. He put his arm round Dolly's waist as he said it, and Dolly pushed him sharply away.

"You are so incautious," she said with protesting peevishness.

"I don't mean to grouse, you know—" he began.

"You don't mean to, but you always do!" returned Dolly in bitterness of spirit.

"You must admit," said the aggrieved Charles, "that this state of things is far from lively. I've got to wait and watch and plan to give my own wife—my *own* wife—a simple kiss, as though I were an Anarchist chap with a bomb to dispose of."

"How can you have the heart to be so ungrateful,"

whimpered Dolly, "when I've run such awful risks on your account already?"

"You mean last night? What! do you call it a risk to sit for five minutes beside me on a trunk in the box-room at the end of the passage in the bachelors' wing," grumbled Charles, "when you weren't seen coming, and nobody suspected?"

Dolly leaned her cheek against the Guardsman's, in which the pink-and-white had given place to a healthy tinge of tan. She twisted one of the buttons of his shooting-coat rather nervously as she said:

"I'm afraid, Charles dear, that—that somebody *did*—"

"Suspect? You're joking!"

Charles craned over to get a good look into the countenance of his bride as he spoke; but Dolly burrowed her face into his tweed-covered shoulder, and began to cry; not noisily but gently, restraining explosive sobs for fear of awakening the sleeper. Perhaps, if either bride or bridegroom had taken the trouble to look, they might at that juncture have caught the twinkle of a bright eye under the shady straw brim of Midge's hat.

"Be calm, my pet!" urged Charles. "Look here! Do I clearly understand you to say that somebody saw you last night?"

"I—I'm afraid I do," admitted Mrs. Charles, with a sniff.

"Going to the box-room or coming away?" Charles lifted up the tearful countenance and dried it carefully with his own handkerchief. Dolly recovered under the stimulating influence of the lover-like attention, and sat up.

"C-coming away!"

"They couldn't have recognised you in that get-up?"

"Oh!" cried Dolly fiercely clenching one small ungloved hand, "I never, never will put on that dress again!"

"Oh, come, I say!"

"Unless there is absolutely no danger of discovery."

"You weren't discovered. Of course, whoever saw you thought it was a ghost. By the by, who was it who did see you?"

"I can't be quite sure. I had nearly got to the end of the passage when I saw a pair of round eyes glaring over a candle. The candle went down with a crash, but I've an idea the eyes belonged to Mr. Pope Dollimore."

The tension of Charles' countenance relaxed. He smiled broadly. "It's all right; we're safe. Pope was three sheets in the wind last night."

"Three sheets?"

"I mean he was a little bosky."

"Bosky?"

"We had been trying some of the Baintree Madeira, one of the pipes laid down after Waterloo by the old General, Lady Baintree's father-in-law, and Dollimore had had a goodish lot, and I persuaded him to top up with hot whisky. He's forgotten all about the ghost by this time."

"The servants are talking so—something must have leaked out."

"You had that from—"

"Braun."

"She's staunch, isn't she?"

"H'm!"

"She'll keep our secret for the present?"

"*For* presents, yes!"

Charles whistled. "She's had three fivers from me."

"And what hasn't she had from me?" cried Dolly tragically. "When nothing else was left, I fell back on frocks. She has eaten her way through my wardrobe like some gigantic moth. Even this gown I've on belongs to her. She lends it me for a consideration! Oh! go away—go away and shoot, and forget the broken-hearted woman who married you in a moment of madness, which never, never can be blotted out!"

Dolly might have become hysterical in good earnest, but at that moment it chanced that Midge awoke—awoke with a little yawn, a perfectly natural yawn, involving a display of pearly teeth and the end of a little red tongue. Charles incontinently fled.

"Oh! Captain Soper is going away," the child cried, with wide-open innocent eyes, pointing to the rapidly-diminishing back-view of their late guest. "Have you been quarrelling?"

"Why should I quarrel with a perfect stranger?" demanded Dolly with some hauteur.

"There wouldn't be any reason in *that*, of course," responded the child. "But a person can't be quite a stranger when he knows you well enough to put his arm round your waist, or to kiss you when you cry."

"Midge!"

"Don't be disingenuous, dear," said Midge. "The girls at Miss Pinnock's were perfectly awful in that way. Don't deny it. He did! Oh! and you've always said you didn't *like* Captain Soper!"

"I don't like him," protested Dolly.

"Fibs!"

"Midge, are you quite sure you saw anything?"

"Sure as sure!" nodded Midge.

"Pet, would you be quite so sure if I were to give you my little pearl brooch?"

Pet considered a moment.

"The heart-shaped one I didn't quite admire when you showed it to me yesterday, or the horse-shoe you've got on now?" she asked.

"The horse-shoe!" cried Dolly desperately.

"I don't think I should," said Midge, after another moment of reflection.

"Take it then," said Dolly.

The horse-shoe changed wearers. The débris of the luncheon was repacked. "Tats" was released from durance vile, and Miss Colquhoun and Miss Garraway drove home to afternoon tea.

CHAPTER XXII

DIANA HEARS

WHAT is this cock-and-bull story of a ghost having been seen," demanded Lady Baintree, "in the bachelors' wing?"

"I thought all that had blown over," said Hilary Warr listlessly, flicking a too-persistent fly from the withers of one of Diana's pony-cobs, an attention which the animal in question recognised by lashing out vigorously. The interruption changed the conversation, for Lady Baintree remarked that "Curvet" and "Caracole" never could stand the whip.

"You might, at the outset of our drive, briefly enumerate a list of the things they *can* stand," returned Warr. "They have already evinced a rooted objection to old women carrying baskets, to barking curs, passing waggons, mill-wheels, blacksmiths' forges, thrashing-machines and chaff-cutters. Their self-possession in the presence of a haystack is still uppermost in my mind."

"You never had a good word for any animal of Pope's choosing," retorted Lady Baintree.

"He still continues to stock your stables with opportunities for your legatees?"

"These were bought at the sale of Mrs. Baddbridge's effects," said Lady Baintree with some triumph.

"You allude to a pink and golden comet with a lengthy train (exclusively composed of male adorers)

who shot across the demi-semi social heavens some three years back?"

"Exactly, and Curvet and Caracole were purchased for her by a well-known authority on horseflesh."

"I understand," said Warr, with a contraction of the brows, "that you are alluding to Lord Rotherholme."

"Precisely; but the allusion contains nothing even remotely discreditable. Rather the opposite!" said Lady Baintree.

"You mean that the sale of Mrs. Baddbridge's effects followed closely on—"

"Upon Rotherholme's marriage with Elizabeth Colquhoun. Such signs did not fail to draw comment."

"Favourable or otherwise?"

"Favourable, of course. When a young man who has perhaps been a little wild, marries and settles, naturally—"

"Naturally the admirers of Mrs. Baddbridge's horses may look out for a good bargain, and enjoy the consciousness at the moment of striking it that they are helping to further the cause of morality."

"Hilary, you are prejudiced against Rotherholme?"

Warr started.

"I hope not."

"You always speak of him with a special bitterness. Has there ever been any cause of disagreement between you?"

"None whatever."

"Why then are you— Is there any old grudge?"

"Beyond my having occupied rooms on the floor immediately beneath his when I was reading for my B.A. degree at Oxford,—I know no reason why I should

bear Lord Rotherholme any grudge whatever," said Warr, buttoning his glove. "But if I convey that idea I am heartily sorry for it. It shows me to myself in an uglier light than that in which one generally cares to view one's Ego. I stand rebuked, Diana!"

The flush upon his face was one of mortification and annoyance. Lady Baintree hated puzzles. She cast one baffled glance at Warr, and harked back to her original subject.

"Who saw it? I mean the ghost?"

"Oh! you are still— I think Pope was the actual interviewer."

"When did it materialise?"

"At about one o'clock in the small hours, Tuesday last. Pope had retired to find something wrong in the state of—not Denmark—but his sleeping accommodations. If you must have it, the sleeves of his night-suit had been carefully sewn up. The garments appertaining had also been skilfully tampered with."

"By whom?" demanded Lady Baintree, with gathering storm about her handsome eyebrows.

"My dear Diana, you would not visit a schoolgirl's trick with all the lightnings of the law?"

"Schoolboy's trick, say! We have only one school-girl, properly speaking, in the house, and she is a modest, shrinking, refined little creature, who is incapable of hoydenism of the kind you mention."

"Tricks are continually played in country-houses of the kind I mention!"

"In country houses of a kind, yes!"

Warr groaned in spirit.

"Continue the relation!" Diana commanded.

"Pope, having discovered that an unwarrantable liberty had been taken with his—"

"Well?"

"He sallied forth in search of scissors, when a razor, as I have reason to know, would have done duty equally well."

"You mean that the same trick had been played upon you?"

"Not quite the same! There were ornamental flourishes. Hair-brushes balanced upon the door-lintel, so as to fall upon one's head at the moment of entrance, and a bed of the apple-pie variety."

"Horrible! But Pope?"

"Pope was proceeding upon his voyage of discovery, guided by the light of a bedroom candle, when he encountered what he calls—an Appearance. It issued from the door of an apartment devoted to broken-down furniture and empty boxes, and flitted—he says it flitted—along the corridor."

"Was the apparition male or female?"

"He didn't stop to inquire. But as it wore trailing skirts and a kind of nun's veil, one might suppose the phantom to be feminine."

"Hah!" ejaculated Lady Baintree.

"That sounds as if you had made up your mind."

"I have!"

"What shall you do?"

"Lay the ghost!"

"With bell, book, and candle?"

"No, with a month's wages," said Lady Baintree. "Stop at the Registry Office as you drive through Bagley-Chitwell. I have always had my doubts of the new stillroom maid."

"Hannah Baggs? Why, she used to be Mrs. Dollimore's model pupil at the Westwood Witton Sunday School!"

Lady Baintree vouchsafed no reply. Nothing associated in the remotest degree with the latest Mrs. Dollimore, the lady who had driven away on the mulberry coloured coach, found favour in her eyes.

For private reasons of his own, Hilary sympathised with the thenceforth beclouded Hannah.

CHAPTER XXIII

CHIEFLY PISCATORIAL

THERE was a lake at Westwood, not large, but still of more consequence than a merely ornamental piece of water. There were reeds and lilies in the reed and lily season, and a boat-house with a punt or two. In the middle of the lake lay an island, a sandwich-shaped island with a Chinese pagoda upon it, which some dead and gone Baintree of a roving disposition had brought back from Canton in 1840 and put up there.

There were fish in the lake, carp and jack, and a couple of swans, whose dearest object in life—other than the desire to lay and hatch out a young family of cygnets in the pagoda—was to prevent the would-be angler from getting a bite.

Upon an occasion, to which particular attention is invited, the would-be anglers who suffered from this predisposition on the part of the swans were Miss Marietta Colquhoun and Lord Clashburnie. In vain the punt-pole was plucked from the mud and used as a convincing argument against feathered interference; in vain—the assailants having apparently retreated round the lee of the pagoda island—was the insidious paternoster baited with the kicking minnow, and slung out amongst the weeds. The swans returned to the attack with renewed vigour, and the disciples of Isaac Walton were again and again confounded.

"You beasts!" ejaculated the Earl, viciously shaking his fist, the back of which, like his plain, good-humoured, conceited boy's face, was splashed with yellow freckles. "If I only had a catapult!"

"What would you do?" asked Midge, luxuriously nestling among scarlet cushions and ceasing to regard her rod with the slightest assumption of interest.

"Pepper 'em," returned his lordship. "We used to do it at Eton."

"And at your place in Scotland?"

"Craigbuckrie? Oh, there are no swans there:—nothing but puffins and solan geese. They breed on the cliffs because they're safe there; nothing without wings can get at them."

"Oh, do go on; it's so interesting about Craigbuckrie. It's an historical place, isn't it? King Alexander the Third was born there, wasn't he?"

"I believe so, or another of those old buffers. But it's not much of a place to look at. The walls are twenty feet thick in places, and the ivy's been growing since the thirteenth century. Beastly damp; but that's the fault of the climate. It's a beastly climate!"

"Oh, and don't you care about Scotland?"

"I suppose I ought, but it's so beastly uncivilised. I've got to wear a kilt, and I loathe kilts; and I'm piped out of bed in the morning and into it at night by six pipers whose ancestors used to wake my ancestors with the same pibroch in the same way in the year One. And I hate that beastly squealing. It gets on my nerves."

"Couldn't you order them to stop?"

"I could, of course; but when a thing's been going on for six hundred years, people get used to it. My

mother—well, she'd think the world was coming to an end if she didn't hear Angus Ruach and his sons and nephews tramping and skirling up and down the great hall or the Castle terrace while she was having her hair done."

"Tell me lots more. Do you go deer-hunting?"

"Stalking, you mean! There are thousands of acres of deer-forest round Craighuckrie, and it has always been the custom for the Laird to shoot in the season. Beastly business, wading through bogs, or lying buried up to the end of your nose in wet heather for a chance of a shot at a soaked beast who isn't fit to eat when you have killed him, without currant jelly and forcemeat."

"But you like other things—fishing, for instance?"

"We've only got salmon and trout and that sort of thing, and you can't catch fish from a boat on our rivers—got to wade—and wadin's beastly!"

"Then you keep motor-cars and lots of horses, and hunt, and drive!" . . .

"Ours is a beastly country for hunting. And the hills are frightful even for automobiles, and as for driving—well! I did have one lark last month. My mother had got a painter-chap staying at the Castle. She likes people who make pictures and books and all that kind of beastly trash."

"Oh, how awfully cynical you are!"

"Do you think so? Well, I asked him to come out driving, and I had four young horses that weren't properly broken in, harnessed to a strong brake, and I took him across country behind 'em. It was beastly jolly! And the painting chap was in a blue funk. I say! here are those dashed swans again."

The swans were returning, invigorated by an inter-

val of rest and refreshment. Lord Clashburnie plucked his paternoster out of the water with gloomy resignation.

"Shall we try again on the other side of the island?" Midge suggested.

"I'd rather stop here!" said the scarlet-headed youth with caution.

"Oh, do say why?"

"We're in sight of the house, and all that."

"Oh, what *has* the house got to do with us?"

"You see," said the Earl, with glowing pimples, "when a fellow and a girl are alone together without a chaperon, nobody can say anything as long as they're well in sight of—of—everybody?"

"Had Dolly Garraway a chaperon last night in the conservatory?"

"Dolly Garraway what?"

"When you were showing her Lady Baintree's Night-blooming *Cereus* yesterday evening after dinner—it didn't seem to occur to you that the presence of a third person was necessary."

"Perhaps not; but circumstances alter cases, you know, and a fellow can't be too careful, so my mother says!"

"Oh! how mysterious you are," cried Midge. "Oh, I am afraid you will think me a stupid little thing; but I don't understand you *a bit!*"

"One mustn't let oneself be compromised, you know," said Clashburnie fatuously. "I knew a fellow who was."

"Oh! was he anything like you?"

"There was a resemblance. He was awfully hand-

some and awfully rich, and all the women were crazy to catch him, and—"

Clashburnie paused weightily, smoothing the orange-coloured down upon his freckled upper-lip. Midge, with the palms of her little white hands tingling with the desire to box the young nobleman's scarlet ears, tossed her golden-brown curls, and sparkled encouragement.

"Well?"

"And a little governess compromised him, and he had to marry her, that's all!"

"Oh! what a clever girl!—I mean what a sly creature!" cried Midge. "How did she manage it?"

"His sister was staying with him in his place in the North—on a visit—and he offered to show the governess over the house. They were together in a room at the top of a tower where people hardly ever came, and she locked the door and dropped the key out of the window. And afterwards she made an awful row to his relations, and he had to marry her. And so I think we'll stop in sight of the house!" said Clashburnie cannily.

"I think it would be better to go in," said Midge, with a delicate little intonation of maidenly propriety.

Lord Clashburnie made no protest. He plucked up the punt-pole, albeit somewhat moodily, and piloted his fair freight to land. As Midge jumped lightly to the bank, Lady Caroline Wragge, who happened to be sitting upon the drawing-room verandah armed with some knitting and a novel, uttered a slight scream and threw herself back despairingly in her creaking bamboo chair.

"A wasp?" suggested Lady Baintree, looking up from the tea-tray just placed beside her.

"Worse!" gasped Lady Caroline. "Look! look there!"

Lady Baintree looked and smiled.

"Milk and sugar? I see nothing to be alarmed at. No, milk and saxe, was it, or plain tea?"

"Diana," said Lady Caroline tragically, "where are your eyes?"

"In my head as usual," said Lady Baintree, cutting cake, "and they reassure me of the not very unwelcome fact that Lord Clashburnie and your child Dolly have been punting on the lake. Indeed, that hat of hers has been a conspicuous point of colour on the landscape for the last three-quarters of an hour."

Lady Caroline rose in majesty.

"Dolly's hat may have attracted your attention. Dolly's hat may have served the purpose for which it has been worn, that of throwing guardians—watchful guardians—off the scent. But its wearer is not my Dolly. Look again! Use this!" She snatched an opera-glass from one of the drawing-room tables. "See for yourself!"

"Midge!" cried Lady Baintree, as the lenses revealed her the trick in its enormity. "Foolish! thoughtless! giddy—"

"Designing!"

"No, no!"

"I repeat the word, Diana! 'Designing.' See, they are straying. She is leading him to the shrubbery. If I am not to follow and shake her, you must interfere!"

Lady Baintree, fluttered for the nonce, hurried in

chase of the offender. Lady Caroline, with a poignant recollection of the fact that Dolly had been straying in regions unknown and unmarked, since that treacherous hat first flaunted its petunia-coloured trimmings into her field of vision, departed in search of her precious charge.

"Darling!" said Midge, some hours later, meeting Dolly, dressed for dinner, and humming a little tune, at an angle of the wide oak staircase. "Did I manage nicely?"

"Ssh! I had just reached the south lodge-gates when I met Braun. She said Aunt Caroline was furious, and looking for me everywhere."

"How unfortunate that she found out! I did my best to induce Lord Clashburnie to fish the other side of the pagoda, but he insisted on stopping in sight of the house. And, oh! it has been such a depressing afternoon."

"And mine was all the other way. Ch—Captain Soper has such a fund of anecdote. But I will make up to you, pet!" said Dolly affectionately.

"You never will care to wear that hat again," said Midge sympathetically, "with any comfort, after the scolding you have had."

"It came from Paris, and cost five pounds," said Dolly, with a sigh; "but take it!"

CHAPTER XXIV

LADY BAINTREE HAS DESIGNS

A WORD, Diana!" said Lady Caroline, rustling into Lady Baintree's private sanctum upon the morning of the eighth.

"One moment, Caroline." Lady Baintree rapidly concluded the note she had been writing, enveloped, addressed, and handed it to the servant who answered the signal of the electric bell upon her writing-table. "An answer to the Dean of Bagley," she explained. "He has consented to lend the encouragement of his presence to our little festival to-night."

"The servants' ball?"

"The servants' ball. His principles are not at all against dancing. 'Wholesome exercise, enlivened by tuneful music, cannot,' he says, 'but be advantageous to both body and mind.' He even offers to lead off the opening country dance with my housekeeper. So cosy and kind of him! I have always esteemed Broad Churchmen. They never object to anything in reason, and even when their prejudices are against a thing, they can always be argued out of them."

"The Dean is an ardent lover of sport, I have heard, Diana, and your preserves are always—"

"It happens to be as you say. But the Dean is incapable—"

"I am sure of it, Diana!"

"My dear, forgive me. You had something to say. . . . Nothing of a grave nature, I trust?"

Lady Caroline rustled in her panoply of stiff brocade, and shook her lace lappets as though lashing herself into fury. Indignation inflated her nostrils and shot lightnings from her eyes.

"I ask a question, Diana, and demand an answer as my right. Why did you invite that impecunious young man,—I allude to Captain Soper—to join your house-party?"

"Surely you do not anticipate any real danger to Dolly? I thought her principles were so firmly grounded that no detrimental, however attractive, could shake them for an instant."

Lady Caroline sat down in a confidential chair upon Diana's right-hand. She always sat down like a collapsing bed of eider-down and rose up like an expanding balloon. The knob, which formed, as it were, the keystone of her Roman nose, shone as though with laborious polishing; her bracelets—she always wore a variety of bracelets, some of them composed of little cubes of precious woods—rattled and clashed, and the brooches disposed about her—she was remarkable for the development of brooches in unexpected places—twinkled like suspicious eyes.

"Diana, my confidence in Dorothea is shaken—I will not say unhinged. I am beginning to suspect—"

"Not an underhand flirtation, surely?"

"Would a young man hover as persistently as that young man hovers—I allude again to Captain Soper—without receiving encouragement in some form? Would a young man hang about, turn up in unexpected places, make off guiltily when observed, blush to the roots of his hair at the encounter of a questioning eye—?"

"Your eye, Caroline!"

"Would he endeavour to prepossess me by respectful attentions, retrieve balls of wool and tatting-shuttles, and fetch and carry footstools with unflagging industry, if there were not some end to be gained by such a course?"

"He has been well brought up. His mother is one of my dearest friends. Surely from a young man to a woman of weight and position—some years his senior—such *petits soins* are not only laudable but natural?"

"Politeness to elders expired with the eighteenth century, Diana. In these days, when a young man pays attention to a middle-aged woman, there is a reason for it. I confess to a growing uneasiness."

The fateful look that Hilary Warr knew so well came into Lady Baintree's face. She laid her right hand impressively upon one of Lady Caroline's timber bracelets.

"Suppose there were a reason other than you think?"

"Diana!"

"Caroline, that young man's mother is most anxious that he should marry sensibly. 'A well preserved woman of property,' I said to her, 'would be the very thing!' Some kind-hearted comfortable creature of—say sixty, whose property was free from entail!"

Lady Caroline's eye-glasses fell, and tinkled against her many brooches. The keystone in the centre of the Roman arch became pink. She had not blushed for years. She murmured in quite a dove-like tone:

"You would not consider sixty too old?"

"My dear Caroline," said Lady Baintree, "with a

good constitution, and a clever maid, what is sixty? Promise me—promise me that you will reflect—”

“Oh!” murmured Lady Caroline.

“Turn over in your mind what I have said. He has talent of a military order. He has invented an officer’s sandwich-box which is practically invaluable in the field. And you must own that he has an agreeable face!”

Lady Caroline had never looked at it in that light before. She admitted it to be fresh and ingenuous.

“Then I may hope that for his mother’s sake you will not discourage any advances Captain Soper may happen to make.” Lady Baintree rose. “I wonder where he is? Since breakfast he has been invisible. . . . The attractions of the coverts, I suppose?”

“He is, or was, when I passed the door, ten minutes ago,” said Lady Caroline, with a slight relapse into her former condition, “in the ball-room, helping my niece and that very objectionable girl with the ridiculous name—”

“Midge Colquhoun—”

“Helping them to put up the decorations. Such an employment brings heads close together,” said Lady Caroline, “and facilitates whispering. I cannot bring myself to approve of it.”

“Your mind—even if disturbed without a cause—shall be relieved. In the meantime,” said Lady Baintree, as, securely mounted upon her hobby, she rode majestically from the room, “think it over, Caroline!—think it over!”

CHAPTER XXV.

ALARMS AND EXCURSIONS

THE Westwood ball-room was a lofty hall with panelled walls, and a heavily-groined ceiling, running up to a roof-lantern of antique stained glass. The great doors were wrought, like the mantelpieces, by Grinling Gibbons, and the musicians' gallery was a wonderful example of stone carving, gilt and painted, which had been brought over bodily from Flanders in the days of Marlborough's glory, by a Baintree who held command under Joseph Addison's destroying angel. Wreaths of evergreens and dahlias had been suspended from the electroliers, flags and festoons were wherever flags and festoons could be. The amateur hand was evident, the general effect of the decorations conveying the idea that a Temperance demonstration, in combination with a bazaar, was imminent. Dolly and Captain Soper, balanced giddily upon a double library ladder, were putting the finishing tacks to a chaste device of welcome in coloured calico and tinsel. Their heads, as Lady Caroline's prophetic fears had signified, were exceedingly close together. They were alone, their associates in labour having repaired to the garden in search of more materials.

"How goes it, little woman?" said the devoted Charles with a rapturous squeeze.

"It's kind of you to inquire," said Dolly, "under the circumstances. Perhaps it would interest you to know that we are on the brink of discovery?"

"We always are!"

"Oh! why," cried Dolly, yielding to an irresistible inclination to whimper, "why must I go and be clandestinely married by a red-nosed registrar in a dingy office, instead of waiting until the thing could be done properly in a church? I was nearly of age. There was no need to be in such a hurry!"

"You were of a different opinion then," growled the bridegroom.

"I yielded to your persuasions. And six months did seem a dreadful time for you to wait. Now you've hammered my finger. No, don't suck it; somebody might come."

"You're awfully nervous to-day."

"So would you be, if you'd had a scene with Braun," said Dolly with a grievous pucker of the lips. "Imagine the treachery of that woman; she threatens to reveal all."

"Phew!"

"And she's in earnest, or she pretends horribly well."

"Look here! does she forget that she was one of the witnesses at the wedding? How is she going to stand the racket when that comes out?"

"She means to plead ignorance of the English customs, I think," said Dolly. "She wants to make out now that she mistook the registrar's office for a photographic studio, and thought that you and I were simply being done together."

"We are being done together!" responded the rueful Charles, tugging at his moustache. "Think of all the cash she's had!"

"Think of my frocks!" returned Dolly. "As far as clothes go, I am in a position, at this moment, identical

with that of Eve before the Fall. Why,—why was I born an heiress?"

"We oughtn't to ask these questions," put in Charles with a virtuous air.

"You are not burdened with riches!"

"Perhaps not, but I can lend you five pounds."

"Somebody's coming!"

"Nonsense!"

"I hear footsteps. Do go to the door and peep out cautiously. Whoever it was may have been listening."

The obedient Charles descended as bidden, cocked an investigating eye through the keyhole and retired in consternation as the door opened to admit the subject of conversation.

It was Braun, buxom and bustling, attired as was her wont in her neat grey alpaca gown and black stuff apron. Under that apron she carried a bundle, and her aspect was formidable, bristling with determination.

"Speak to her," the distracted Dolly signalled, and the desperate Charles hurled himself into the breach as ordered.

"Ahem! is that you, my good girl?" he began, in a voice whose ingratiating mildness did not produce the desired effect. "Good-day, Braun!" he continued, with a nervousness made manifest by the laboriousness of his effort to seem at ease.

But Braun only responded with an equine snort of disdain.

"Did you—did you want me, Braun?" faltered Dolly, quailing beneath the fixed regard of the sturdy German.

"I Miladi look for, dat is all!" returned Braun.

"Is it—is it anything particular," gasped Dolly, "that you wanted to see her about?"

"Noding," returned the Teutonic handmaiden. "Noding bardicular! Poot I a disgofery haf made, dat is all! In a baber barcel in your room. See!" She triumphantly produced a tightly rolled-up bundle from concealment beneath the black stuff apron. She shook it out, and held it up before the conscience-stricken regard of the unhappy culprit, whose partner in concealment groaned:

"The ghost's gown, by Jove!"

Dolly found voice in contemplation of impending disaster.

"You don't mean—you wouldn't really—"

"You couldn't, you know," put in Charles. "It would be too beastly mean, after all—"

Braun favored him with another glance of contempt, and another snort of disdain.

"You see dese dings?" She addressed herself exclusively to Dolly. "You dem recognise? I say again I find dem in your room!"

"You—you made them for me!" pleaded Dolly.

"*Ach Himmel!*" cried Braun, "vat lies!"

"'Lies'! I like that!" said Charles, gathering courage. "When you planned the whole thing—"

"You know you went with us to the registrar's," added Dolly.

"*Ich—ich? Sicherlich nicht!*" cried Braun, with eyes uplifted to the ceiling.

"Don't dare to deny it, woman!" exclaimed Charles, upon which the belligerent favoured him with a snort

of such appalling volume that he retired in extreme confusion behind the weaker vessel.

"The money!" whispered Dolly distractedly. "The five pounds you said you'd—"

Charles hurriedly extracted a crumpled bank-note from his waistcoat pocket, and squeezed it into the hand extended behind his wife's back.

"Don't be too prompt to part," he hissed. "Offer her half to begin with!"

"Sh!" Dolly addressed the irate handmaiden in pleading tones. "Why—why are you going to turn against us, you cruel, cruel girl?" she said, "after all the heaps and heaps of things you've had, too!" The recollection of her depleted wardrobe wrung tears. She wiped them away with a flimsy little lace-edged handkerchief, and turned imploring eyes on the pitiless Braun.

"You to de Fraulein Midge de bearl prooch und de Paris hat haf given," returned the German. "Haf you not, is it not true?"

"I certainly—" Dolly faltered; "but they were my own, you know, to dispose of—"

"Und de information I bossess is also mine—to dispose of," retorted Braun. "So I de honoured lady look for, vid de news her to acquaint, dat you no longer the Fraulein Dolly are, but de Frau Soper!"

She folded her tightly-sleeved arms firmly across her plump bosom, as she uttered her determination, and the Frau Soper felt that no time was to be lost.

"And when you have told Lady Caroline," she cried, "what do you think will happen?"

"What? . . . Everydings will go *p'st!*" replied Braun, snapping her fingers illustratively.

"So everything will," growled Charles in his spouse's distracted ear. "Quick! Offer her the—you know!"

"Braun, *dear* Braun, would you consent to hold your tongue just a little longer if I offered you—"

"Two pounds," prompted Charles.

"Two pounds?"

Braun maintained silence.

"Say it again!" urged Charles.

"She always pretends not to have heard if the bribe is not big enough," Dolly whispered back.

"Say three, then."

"Three pounds, Braun?"

Braun tossed her large head and drooped her eyelids contemptuously. They were thick, white eyelids, garnished with a scanty fringe of flaxen lashes, and the eyes they appertained to were round, and of a light china-blue.

"*Ach nein!* My broder in Chairmany for bread and butter hungers. If more dan dat you cannot gif, I to de honoured lady dese must take. For you my feelings haf very sick made about dat bearl brooch und Paris hat!"

"*Four* pounds, Braun?"

Braun deigned no answer, but rolled up the garments of conviction into a sausage-shaped bundle, and, wheeling round, began to walk slowly and deliberately in the direction of the door by which she had entered.

"Oh, stop!" shrieked Dolly.

Braun paused. "My broder in Chairmany—"

"Hang her brother in Germany!" growled the madened Charles. "Blue the whole lot!"

"*Five* pounds, Braun?"

"*Gnädige Frau*, I dank you!" Braun dropped an

ironical curtsey as the crackling piece of tissue-paper changed hands. "Dis will do moch goot to my broder in Chairmany! Here! I dond wand dese dings. Catch!"

The confounded Charles received the sausage-shaped bundle in his arms—upon the fair expanse of his newest waistcoat. Miss Braun left the ball-room. Upon the threshold she encountered Hilary Warr. He stood aside to let her pass, and as he did so, glanced at her curiously. There was a puzzled look upon his face as he joined her hapless victims.

"I came to tell you that luncheon was ready. Lady Baintree has ordered it to be served earlier because of to-night's festivities," he said.

Charles, hugging the compromising sausage, rushed from the room.

"One minute, Miss Garraway," said Warr, as Dolly untied her housemaid's apron, drew off her gardening gloves, and moved to the door. "That young woman who left the room just now—! Is she in service here?"

"She is Aunt Caroline's maid," said Dolly. "She is German, and her name is Braun—Wilhelmina Braun. And she came over to England some months ago, three or four, I forget which, to find a friend."

"You will pardon what may seem an impertinent question," said Warr. "But did Lady Caroline receive this Miss—Braun upon any—any special recommendation?" He pulled at his crisp pointed beard as he spoke; there was a keen light of anxiety, or anger, in his handsome hazel eyes.

"Aunt Caroline took her without any recommendation, I believe," Dolly answered. "It is an unusual

thing to do, but her story sounded satisfactory, and she gave references."

"Might I ask—might I beg to know the names of the persons to whom Miss Braun referred."

"I think one was a brother in Germany," returned Dolly, "and the other, I have a vague idea that he was a London solicitor, but I have not the faintest recollection of his name or address."

"Thank you! I am as wise—or only a little less so than I was at the beginning!" said Hilary Warr.

CHAPTER XXVI

A MEETING AND SOME GOOD ADVICE

MARR went out after luncheon for a stroll in the grounds. He had done his duty by Diana and guests during the last week—organising shooting-parties, devising driving excursions, planning picnics, helpfully assisting at charades, beating the entire neighbourhood to muster up tennis-players for matches, taking in the stoutest and most important of the party dowagers one by one to dinner. His soul was weary of it all: the meaningless chatter, the aimless life, the laborious daily round of attempts to be entertained—to amuse—sickened him.

He passed under a great cedar tree that stood at an angle of the house, spreading its wide arms over an area of grassless turf littered with its own fine needles. The spicy breath that exhaled from the trodden leaves underfoot, from the overshadowing branches above, brought to him memories of those days at Cannes; when he drank in the glory of the sapphire sea and the splendour of the sunset; saw Elizabeth's white hand leaning in the little stream that sprang from between tufts of maidenhair and narcissi, to trickle down the cliff. Again he was conscious of the glamour of her presence, could almost hear her breathing, smell the perfume of her hair. He had not felt her so near since they parted,—the first parting. . . . He winced at the sting of remembered rejection,—he felt

again the incredulous surprise of the discovery of her astounding worldliness. It seems—to a man—incredible that a young and pretty woman should be worldly—that the melting liquid eye of loveliness should be directed unswervingly towards the main chance.

"I must shake this off," said Warr, savagely biting the end of his cigar. "I have a touch of fever, I believe, and want quinine, or bromide, the mandragora of the nineteenth century lover, to 'medicine me to sweet forgetfulness.' I will forget! Why should I not when she does not remember?"

The path that he had followed guided him through a doorway leading into the inner courtyard of the great house; a stone-flagged square with a patch of green lawn in the middle commanded by the windows of the kitchens and servants' offices. A glass door before him gave access to a passage communicating with the entrance hall. Through this, as Warr advanced, came a stout, fluffy-haired, fair-complexioned young woman of thirty or so, dressed in a quiet grey gown, and aproned with demure and respectable black. Warr recognised Lady Caroline's maid, the young person who had come over from Germany to find a friend. She was stepping out to breathe the air, probably, in an interval of leisure. Warr's observation centred upon her again, and the puzzled fold reappeared between his eyebrows.

Possibly Miss Braun was not indifferent to the proximity of a handsome man. She passed so near to Warr that the folds of the demure grey gown brushed his clothing, and ogled as she passed.

"A fine afternoon, Fraulein," said Warr.

"Ach ja, mein Herr!"

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"You were thinking of a walk in the garden?"

"*Ach ja, mein Herr!*" assented Miss Braun. "De flowers schmell so goot," she added sentimentally.

"Before you smell the flowers," said Warr, languidly removing his straw hat, "may I beg to detain you for one moment?"

Miss Braun's china-blue glance took in the vigorous grace of the tall, lightly-built figure, the brightness of the hazel eyes, the pose of the handsome head, the crisp burnished waves of the hair that crowned it. Few women, high or low, could look at Warr without approval. The German folded her hands and dropped a curtsy of mock humility. She was at the Herr's disposal, if the Herr honoured her by having anything to say.

"It's not anything of severe importance," said Warr languidly, "only a question. Isn't your name Lena Meyer?"

The German started violently. A dull red flush spread slowly over her plump white cheeks.

"*Ach nein, mein Herr!* Braun is my name."

"That Braun is your name to-day, I do not doubt," said Warr coolly. "But think a little.—Try to emulate my talent for remembering. Try to recall Oxford—some fifteen years ago. You were one of the young ladies who served behind the counter at a certain confectioner's in the High Street. I have eaten tarts there scores of times—and so used other men—hundreds of other men. I had a digestion in those days. Now I have only an excellent memory, Miss Lena Meyer."

"I don't know noding about what you talk!" burst from the German woman violently.

"No? but I do, and it makes all the difference, Miss

Meyer," said Warr. "For instance, I could give you the date of your leaving your situation at the confectioner's—for another—presumably an easier one. And so could Lord Richard Milwall—now the Marquis of Rotherholme. But with him I have nothing to do. My present business is to warn you that I shall consider it my duty to acquaint my cousin, Lady Baintree, and your mistress, Lady Caroline Wragge, with certain facts which occurred within my knowledge fifteen years ago."

"Bah!" ejaculated the German, "I marry very shortly after dat."

"After I met you in Brussels with Lord Milwall?"

"*Ach!* you are wise!" leered the German woman, "you sthink you know so motch!"

"I know," said Warr slowly, "that you are not a fit person to hold the position you have obtained, doubtless by means of forged references, in the household of Lady Caroline Wragge. I wish you no ill; of that I assure you; I will personally make good whatever money-loss the deprivation of your present situation may entail upon you. I leave it to you to choose whether you resign your post in Lady Caroline's service of your own will, or are dismissed. Better take an hour or two to decide, or—" as the German broke into explosive sobs, "I do not wish to treat you hardly; let me hear your decision to-morrow morning. Remember I have said you shall be no lighter in pocket by any action of mine. Good afternoon."

Warr turned upon his heel and passed into the house. The German woman dried her tears, and shook her clenched fist at his retreating back, and spat upon the ground. Then her face regained in an instant its

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former expression of suave docility, and, abandoning her original intention of smelling the flowers, she went back into the house to impart the usual artistic undulations to Lady Caroline's evening wig.

CHAPTER XXVII

LADY BAINTREE LEADS THE HORSE TO THE WATER

POPE DOLLIMORE and Lady Baintree had an interview in the drawing-room pending the arrival of her other guests and the announcement of dinner.

"I acknowledge that what has—has gone before has prejudiced you—excusably," admitted Lady Baintree, "I know, as you put it, how the other two turned out. But you are aware of the saying about the third trial. Oh, Pope! you have always been guided by my advice—be guided now. For the sake of old days, promise me that presently—not after dinner, but in the course of the evening—you will take that dear child into the conservatory and put the question. You can be showing her my Night-blooming *Cereus*—and work round to the subject of your solitude. It is so easy to do, once you have made up your mind."

"And so extraordinarily difficult to undo!"

"Pope, I implore you, don't throw cold water—"

"What I am afraid of, Diana," said Pope metaphorically, "is the getting into hot!"

Lady Baintree clasped her hands.

"Promise me—promise me you will gratify me in this one instance," she urged, "for the sake of old days!"

Pope, ever sensitive to any allusion to those days, relented.

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"Won't she think it sudden?" he objected feebly.

"Girls like to be taken suddenly," said Lady Baintree. "Surprise is half the secret of victory!"

Pope, struck by a new thought, brightened visibly. "After all, she may not accept."

"If she is the girl I take her for, she will jump at you!" said Diana. Then her tune changed. "Consider how many times you have disappointed me," she implored. "Upon the day Elizabeth was married, you all but gave me your word of honour that you—!"

"I did promise, I admit. But my courage failed. . . . I confess it," said Pope; "my courage failed." . . . He rocked backwards and forwards upon his little patent leather pumps, and gasped like an indisposed goldfish.

"Let it not fail to-night!" said Lady Baintree in a blank-verse tone, worthy of the greatest living feminine exponent of high tragedy. She left Pope in a condition of nervous apprehension, bordering upon collapse, and went forward to meet the Dean of Bagley, who at that moment trotted in. Surrounded as the lady of Westwood was with guests, hemmed in by social attentions, and laden with the hostess's little duties, she found a moment to exchange a whisper with Lady Caroline, and another in which to intrust Captain Charles Soper with the conveyance of a message to his mother, as we are aware, one of her dearest friends. "Does she still take an interest in Botany?" she inquired. "I remember so vividly hearing her speak of her hot-houses, and the specimens she reared, with the assistance of M'Tavish, her gardener. Does she still retain M'Tavish? A most intelligent man! Pray remember me to him when next you meet him; and oh!

I should like you to inspect my Night-blooming *Cereus*. From seven in the evening until twelve at night it is open, you know. . . . And if your dear mother has never seen one, she would like, I am sure, to hear it described. After dinner I shall expect you to visit the conservatory, and perhaps you will oblige me by taking Lady Caroline Wragge. She is also an enthusiast, and an amateur. Are you not, Caroline?" She skilfully entangled Lady Caroline in the meshes of a conversation with the Guardsman, and retired. Captain Soper took Lady Caroline down to dinner subsequently. Certainly, Diana Baintree was a wonderful woman!

"Tact," that wonderful woman was wont to say, "is the most indispensable of all the gifts and qualities that go to make up a successful woman of society. To understand how not to do a thing is as necessary as knowing how to do it!" She smoothed Midge's bright hair maternally, as the child settled down, childishly and caressingly, as was her wont, upon the drawing-room hearthrug at the feet of Lady Baintree. It was a chilly evening, and a bright wood fire crackled in the steel basket, and added another pleasant odour to the perfumed atmosphere of the charming room.

"You can do everything," said Midge. "You are Cinderella's fairy-godmother—only a young one, you know, not an old one. And you know everything. Explain to me one thing I never could understand. How can a girl—a designing girl—compromise—I know the word is compromise, because it's so hard to say—how can a girl compromise a gentleman?"

"My own!" exclaimed Lady Baintree in a shocked

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tone, "who has been talking to you about such dreadful things?"

"I read a story—perhaps I oughtn't to have read it, without asking if it was a proper story—" said Midge, "the other day. It was about a pretty but poor little girl who wanted to marry a rich young man. And she thought she'd compromise him. So she took him up to the top of a tower, and dropped the door-key of the room, you know, out of the window. And people couldn't find them for ever so long. And then she made a row to his relations—and he had to marry her. Now, what is your opinion of that girl?"

"She must have been a designing creature," said Lady Baintree warmly.

"But when he'd married her," said Midge acutely, "didn't people forget to call her those names? He had a title, and she was a countess."

"Of course she would be received," said Lady Baintree. "If she had remained plain Miss—after the scandal, of course the verdict of society would have been less lenient."

"Then," commented Midge, showing her pearly little teeth, and tossing back her lovely head with a spirited gesture, "the whole secret of success is not to remain plain Miss—after the scandal!"

Lady Baintree would have exclaimed, but that a servant stood at her elbow with a telegram. She opened the yellow missive, and uttered a little cry of pleased astonishment.

"Such a delightful surprise!" she said in answer to looks of curiosity. "Lord and Lady Rotherholme arrive to-night." She read the message aloud:—

"Tattums scratched for St. Leger. Coming to you after all; drop in to-night ten-thirty—ROTHERHOLME."

"You did not expect them until much later in the month?" suggested Lady Caroline.

"No; but something has befallen the mare Richard had in training, it seems, and so a change of plan—" She rose. "I must order preparations to be made. Fortunately the rooms intended for them are vacant. Hilary, oblige me by ringing and ordering the limousine to meet the train from Doncaster at—ten-fifteen I think is the time, but you will ascertain."

She left the room. Strange noises sounded in Warr's ears. He moved to the bell almost unsteadily. The sight of his own perturbed face in the mantel-mirror shocked and amazed him. Coming! Elizabeth! Once more to be a guest under the same roof that sheltered her. . . . He looked dizzily across the room, and met something like a glance of sympathy and comprehension from Pope Dollimore's round eyes. Everybody was talking at once, and no one else observed his agitation. He gave the necessary directions to the servant, and followed the man out of the room, ostensibly to verify the time at which the train might be expected to arrive from Doncaster. The house seemed to him insufferably hot and overcrowded, as he stood at the head of the staircase looking down into the entrance-hall. The portraits of deceased Baintrees—for the most part podgy and round-headed; of Warrs, ancestors of his and Diana's, brave in the finery of antique court-fashions, or sombre in scholarly robes, seemed to stare at him with human comprehending

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looks, like Pope's. Yes! they were all alive. Life was circulating in his own veins, whose tide had run so sluggishly, so stagnantly, a moment before. Existence had some flavour after all! The dinner he had scarcely touched; he recalled its excellence with a flash of appreciative memory. A beautiful point in the landscape he had looked upon that very day with dull, unseeing eyes, recurred to his mental vision as having been worthy of admiration. Why, in Heaven's name, this recrudescence of emotion, of sentiment, this sudden wakening of sensation—this renewal of joy in life? Because in another hour he should see again the woman—wife of another—to whom he had bidden good-bye for ever on her bridal morning.

He hurried downstairs and went out. It was a damp evening, and chill. The stars shone through veils of murky vapour. The leaves that had fallen since the morning were thick at his feet. But once more he moved enchanted through a magic country, whose breezes were laden with perfume, beneath the purple dome of skies that blazed with stars of Oriental splendour. He knew his joy had no foundation. He knew that the coming moment had no gift for him but pain, and yet he welcomed it, feared it, hated and desired it with sick yearning.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ACROSS THE VOID

THE sound of car-tyres crushing the gravel of the drive was the "Open Sesame!" that burst the great doors apart. Lady Baintree surged down the staircase, regal in purple velvet, old point and sapphires—to welcome the guests.

"She has grown taller," was her outspoken thought on meeting Elizabeth's grave, luminous grey eyes through the heavy travelling-veil. "He has grown smaller," flashed through her mind upon greeting Lord Rotherholme. That nobleman, attired in a voluminous overcoat of sporting cut and light colour, certainly appeared shrunken, cold, and sleepy.

"My dear Rotherholme," said Lady Baintree, warmly shaking the little gentleman by both hands, "how are you?"

"I'm fairly fit, thanky!" said Rotherholme, struggling with the huge buttons of the gigantic coat. He pulled off his little gloves peevishly, and unrolled a silk wrapper from his throat with the assistance of his valet. "You all chirpy?" he was considerate enough to inquire, as Midge gave him a timid smile, and jumped upon her sister's neck with the requisite amount of childish joy. The great fire in the hall possessed attractions for the chilled travellers. Lady Baintree ordered tea as a restorative for Lady Rotherholme. Her lord preferred stonger precautions—with Perrier.

Elizabeth sank down upon the great oaken settle near the glowing apple logs, that snapped and crackled on their silvered steel dogs. Her silk-lined sables slipped from her shoulders. She put up one white hand and wearily took off her veil.

"How pale she is," thought Lady Baintree, "and how much handsomer than I had imagined."

"Alarmin' good that old Glengarrif of yours," said Lord Rotherholme. "Excuse my joke, but as a rule the widow's cruse contains confounded inferior tipple!" He laughed at the joke himself, and rubbed his lean hands upon his bony little knees. Elizabeth's eyes rested for a moment upon him, and then wandered dreamily away into space again.

"Used she to be so absent?" wondered Lady Baintree. The next moment Elizabeth's face leapt into light and colour like a suddenly unfolded tropical flower. The grey eyes, still pools of subdued brightness, flashed into fire; her lips parted, her breath came quick and fast. "Oh!" she uttered softly, with scarcely parted lips—and then fell silent. Hilary Warr had entered the hall, and was amongst them.

"My cousin," explained Lady Baintree to Lord Rotherholme; "you have met before at Oxford, I believe?" she added.

"Sir, to you!" said Lord Rotherholme, jerking his head in recognition of Warr's stiff bow. "You've met my wife?" he added, as Elizabeth and the newcomer exchanged distant signals of recognition.

"Some years ago I had the honour of an introduction to Lady Rotherholme," said Warr. "I am gratified to find that she has not forgotten the fact."

Elizabeth smiled, a moonlight smile, with a touch

of frost in it, and gave her attention wholly to her hostess.

"Was Paris heavenly?" Lady Baintree was asking.

"Paris was—Paris," said Elizabeth with a slight shrug.

"That bored air becomes her," thought Diana. She said aloud, "Well, you can't improve on that!"

"The crossin' was rotten nasty both ways," remarked Lord Rotherholme. "Weather uncompromisin' bad—and passengers packed like herrin'."

"You found the Channel choppy?" cooed Lady Baintree sympathetically.

"Just rough enough to be invigorating," said Elizabeth, with the frosty moonlight smile.

"Invigoratin' for you, very; but what price me?" remarked Rotherholme aggrievedly.

"Did you have one of those wobbly old tubs?" asked the hostess.

"Had a basin!" returned Rotherholme briefly.

Lady Baintree shuddered, and cast a drowning glance at Warr, who, for a wonder, did not plunge to her assistance.

But Elizabeth spoke of Doncaster—of the house—a bachelor residence of Rotherholme's, where they had been staying. She had found it dull.

"You had no guests?" queried Lady Baintree.

"One," said Elizabeth. "A friend of Richard's."

"Someone I know?" hazarded Lady Baintree.

Elizabeth shook her head with that flickering smile that broke up the stillness of her face for one instant, only to die out instantly.

"Not a member of our own circle?"

"A member of Richard's circle," said Richard's wife. The Ring."

"My dear!" ejaculated Diana, "what was his name?"

"The Putney Puncher," returned Lady Rotherholme nguidly.

"The——?" Lady Baintree's handsome eyebrows pressed unbounded astonishment. "The Putney uncher?"

"Otherwise known as Blimey Peters," explained ord Rotherholme, "from a favourite expression. /onderful gifted man with his hands—and one of ie most rapid redoocin' weights known to the sportin' ncy. By trade a plumber at Hoxton, and one of ie best, take him all in all."

"How interesting!" exclaimed Lady Baintree. "Describe the Putney Puncher, dear," she added, turning Elizabeth.

"He is," said Elizabeth wearily, "a hoarse person, enerally distinguished by a white great-coat and a lum-coloured eye. He smokes something very strong —Richard says a peculiar variety of tobacco—in a clay ipe. He prefers port wine in a tumbler to any other orm of liquid refreshment; and he suffers from ex- ruciating embarrassment when in the presence of dies."

"Look here, Lizzy!" protested Lord Rotherholme, that's comin' it too strong. Blimey Peters backward ith the fair sex!" He turned to Lady Baintree. Don't you believe her! Don't you mistake! I've en two of the rippin'est gals on record simply tearin' ne another's features over that man." He wrestled ith an inner pocket, and produced a cigar-case, a few zes smaller than a leather travelling-desk. He opened

it—he took out a large cigar, which he held to his little pinched nose and sniffed at. “Any lady no objection?” he said; “I’m spoilin’ for a weed.”

“Mr. Warr will take you to the smoking-room,” said Lady Baintree, eager to avert the breaking of the house’s strictest rule.

Warr stepped forward with grave politeness. Lord Rotherholme extended his huge cigar-case.

“What? You won’t? Smoke cigarettes, eh?” he ejaculated with a disgusted accent, as Warr indicated his refusal. “Silly little female things I call ’em. However, every man to his taste. Go as you please, and you’ll please me. That’s what I say to everyone—except my wife, of course. Ha! ha! ha!”

The door closed behind both men. Lady Baintree turned gushingly to Elizabeth. She kissed her again on both cheeks.

“What a perfect character your husband is!” she cried in a little gush of feeling.

Elizabeth assented with a twilight smile now—the moon had gone behind a cloud.

“He has a heart of gold,” pronounced Lady Baintree. Then she begged for more news of the tour. “There are twenty minutes yet,” she said, “before you need go up to dress. You were at Florence, and Nice, and Cannes? Were the sunsets at Cannes up to the usual standard?”

Elizabeth was looking at her, white to the lips.

“The sunsets at Cannes?” she repeated.

“My cousin, Warr—Hilary Warr,” explained Lady Baintree, “whom you know slightly—he was at your wedding.”

“No!” said Elizabeth.

"No?—I remember now," said Lady Baintree, "that he came in late."

"He came in late," said Elizabeth, holding to the genial blaze of the wood fire the white hand on which shone her wedding-ring.

"Hilary has one of those Cannes sunsets on the brain," said Lady Baintree. "Oh, the old story! A pretty girl—a handsome man—a mutual inclination—and a wise resolve. They parted very sensibly—and he pretends he has got over it, but I know better. Cynicism is so often a mask that covers ultra-sentimentality."

"Did he tell you the story?" asked Elizabeth, still warming the white palm at the glow from the hearth-place.

"Some of it, suppressing her name, of course," said Lady Baintree, "and I made out the rest. But let us go back to your wedding. I have launched a good many girls upon the ocean of matrimony in my time, but if I were to expire to-morrow, it would be with the unshaken conviction that there never was, and never will be a wedding like yours."

"I have often thought so since," agreed Elizabeth.

"It was absolutely perfect," said Lady Baintree, ringing down her handsome eyebrows from their height of gratified retrospection. She pressed Elizabeth's hand.

"There was only one thing wanting," said Elizabeth, withdrawing the hand, but so gently that the action seemed something more suave than rejection of caress.

"I know!" cried Lady Baintree, sitting rigidly upright. "Stiffening at the bottom of that new-shaped

skirt. Madame Lange urged it on me, but I didn't dare—'*One can be too much in advance of the fashion,*' a voice seemed to whisper within me. And after all, in two weeks' time—"Tears rose in her fine eyes. "Women are weak sometimes," she sighed, "when they should be most strong. Don't reproach me, Elizabeth!"

Elizabeth said in a voice that had twilight in it, like her smile—"I do not reproach you, Diana. It was all—" she paused and added, "all my own doing from the beginning."

The grey dreariness of the tone struck Lady Baintree. "Don't take it so seriously, dear child," she said, laying her hand on Elizabeth's shoulder.

"I do not," returned Elizabeth. "If I did—if for one moment I were to take things seriously, Diana, I could not live."

Lady Baintree caught a note of tragedy. "You are quite happy, dear," she said, "of course?"

Elizabeth answered with another interrogation—the parry of the feminine duellist:

"Haven't I got everything in the world that means happiness for a woman?"

This was gratitude, and it warmed Lady Baintree to the marrow. She was so seldom thanked by those whose lives she had adjusted to her own ideas of suitability. She kissed Elizabeth effusively. The cheek which her lips touched was of a velvety perfumed coldness like a frozen peach. And then, the embrace being ended, Elizabeth went up to dress.

CHAPTER XXIX

FUSION AND CONFUSION

THE music-gallery in the ball-room afforded accommodation for a local band. The guests had ved in groups, batches and shoals. They wore r best clothes, and—the male portion of the as- blage—were painfully aware of it. White muslin ribbons prevailed among the younger women, rust- silk and lace lappets among the older ones, while aturally stiff collars, and faces polished to smart- pitch, distinguished the sterner sex. Until the mn moment when the arrival of their hostess and house-party upon the scene was heralded by a pom- s rolling back of folding-doors, a certain degree of liness—even rompish liveliness—had prevailed. the entrance of Lady Baintree, heading her proces- , upon the arm of Lord Rotherholme, stiffened the pients of her hospitality into stone. Lady Rother- ne followed with the Earl of Clashburnie, Lady oline Wragge hung upon the consecrated elbow of Dean of Bagley. Other couples trailed after in sequence. Hilary Warr found Dolly Garraway's : eyes in close proximity to his shoulder. Pope limore knew himself the submissive captive of Miss rietta Colquhoun.

he opening dance was of the country description. ly Baintree lent her glove to her butler for the sure. The butler was a discreet and experienced

personage, and performed his onerous duty of attending his mistress through the figures with all due reverence, and an air of handing innumerable salvers. The clerical dignitary and the housekeeper, stately in crackling moire-antique and thread-lace, were the next couple.

"I shall ask that rosy-cheeked young gardener," said Dolly, tripping away upon her philanthropic errand. Midge bestowed her hand upon a timid groom. Lady Caroline petrified the coachman with her preference. Lord Clashburnie honoured a housemaid; Hilary Warr selected Hannah Baggs, upon whom the cloud of her mistress' displeasure was ere long to fall. Pope Dollimore sought refuge amidst the crackling muslin skirts of a buxom cook. The country dance began.

"It is an epitome of married life," said Pope Dollimore as he passed Warr in the course of a hesitating excursion from one point of bewilderment to another. "The essence of it seems to consist in changing partners."

"It is a good deal like a cheap boarding-house dinner," said Warr. "You begin with a hash and you end up in a jelly." He laughed more loudly than was his wont, and glanced across to where Lady Rotherholme was standing, beside a shabby old man in a worn suit of black, who might have been the servant of some fallen family. "Did she choose him out of real good-nature, or is it done for effect?" he thought. "She used to have a heart, or I imagined so. She used to be a pretty girl—she is now a beautiful woman."

She wore a dress of creamy white, relieved with

deep moss-green. There were yellow roses at her breast and in her hands. Her dead-leaf hair was gathered in great knots and masses at the back of her small proud head; there were seven rows of gleaming pearls, the famous Norchester pearls, about her throat—otherwise she wore no jewels save her rings; *the* ring amongst them that bound her to another man, remembered Hilary.

She caught his eyes on her—his regard had been more earnest than he knew—and he saw her shudder and grow pale. It cut him to the quick that she should shrink from him. He looked instantly away, resolving not to look again. The music chattered unmeaningly in his ears, and the plump cotton-gloved hand of his partner seemed an intolerable burden. At that moment the country dance, which had begun with a muddle, ended in hopeless confusion. The humbler dancers retired in embarrassment to the parquet.

"How nice it is," said Lady Baintree, "to see all those people enjoying themselves so respectfully."

"Are they enjoying themselves, Diana?" queried Pope Dollimore, with one gloved hand pressed to his bewildered brow.

"Can you doubt it?" ejaculated Lady Baintree. "We are here to give tone, to elevate and repress at the same time. How can you doubt it?"

"It doesn't occur to you?" suggested Pope mildly, "that they—that they would get on better—be jollier—if they were left to themselves?"

He quailed as he encountered the severe glance of Lady Baintree.

"Heaven forbid!" she breathed, "that my house should be given over to jollity. Refined amusement,

yes!—but vulgar—if I may use the word—rampageousness—no! a thousand times no!”

Pope bit his gloves and regretted that he had spoken. But the first bars of a waltz sounded from the musician's gallery. Urged by a sudden daring impulse, he placed his arm about the waist of Lady Baintree.

“We have not waltzed together—since we were boy and girl,” she was beginning to protest.

“Let us be boy and girl again—if only for five minutes, Diana!” he said entreatingly.

Lady Baintree yielded. Her other guests were drawn into the vortex. Refinement revolved in the middle of the floor, whilst vulgarity stood on the edge of the parquet, with its hands dangling helplessly and its shoulders to its ears, and looked on. Was this the mingling of elements?

“I am so attached to the lower classes, aren't you?” cried Midge, teetotuming with the Earl of Clashburnie. Charles had already claimed his Dolly, and was reversing with the determined intention of having the floor all to himself. The music quickened, the throng of dancers thickened. James, mustering courage, seized Susan, redolent of pomatum and lavender water, and crackling in cheap muslin. Hodge grabbed Phyllis and lumbered into the giddy round. Warr found himself bowing before Elizabeth. They had never danced together. No memories were there to be awakened. Why not?

“May I beg a turn?” he said, and Elizabeth rose without looking at him, and put her hand upon his arm.

“You are ill,” said Warr hurriedly, for she swayed against him as though about to swoon, and the purple

shadows about her eyes—there had been no shadows there in the old days—grew deeper.

“I am tired,” said Elizabeth. “If you will leave me, I will sit and rest. Please go!”

Warr went, almost in relief. He could almost hear the beating of his own heart. He knew that hers had fluttered, behind the barrier of her laces—the mask of her white bosom—like a wild bird encaged. He stumbled from the ball-room through one of the open French windows that looked out on the courtyard.

“Elizabeth—Elizabeth! Oh, the shame, the pity, the grief of it all. Elizabeth!”

CHAPTER XXX

A COLLISION

SENSATION was numbed in Warr; he moved like an automaton. He hardly felt the stones of the courtyard beneath his feet, the damp night-wind of autumn blowing in his face. The strains of the waltz grated on ears grown dull; he glanced up at the stars, whose twinkling pin-points were shining through drifting veils of greyish vapour. If constellations, magnified as those of the Equator, had blazed upon his field of vision; if comets had met in collision and exploded in showers of fiery meteors, he would have remained unobservant and indifferent, so true it is that the clash of disturbing elements within the little world called man, render its tenant blind, deaf, and unconscious to the phenomena of the greater world on which he stands, and the millions that revolve about it. He had thought himself cured—so thoroughly cured! He had not been prepared for that convulsion of his whole being which had been wrought by the touch of Elizabeth's hand upon his arm. He had not know her power so strong, or his own resolution so feeble. He was filled with contempt at the revelation of his weakness.

The ball-room was lighted upon the side facing the courtyard by six long windows, from one of which he had just emerged. The dancers revolving past the lighted spaces—stout cooks with young gardeners,

timid housemaids clinging to the elbows of dignitaries of the coach-box, liveried footmen scattering powder as they pranced in company with Dulcineas of the servants' hall—made up a grotesque panorama. Lady Baintree and her house-party had withdrawn, their condescending smiles imparting no more leaven to the revel, and the spirits of the revellers seemed to have increased in ratio. One or two of the men who had found partners to their liking, lingered on. The Earl of Clashburnie, who had succumbed to the attractions of Hannah Baggs, the still-room maid; the faithless Charles, who footed it with a pink-cheeked giggling Phyllis from the Vicarage; and Lord Rotherholme, who clung affectionately to the stalwart waist of a village charmer, a black-locked, gipsy-eyed, bouncing Bet, who stood at least six feet high in her cotton stockings. The flaccid little nobleman was almost electrified by the vicinity of so much vigour. His sandy little eyes twinkled. There was something like a tinge of colour in his sallow cheeks. He seemed to prattle with vivacity, doubtless heightened by libations of the old Glen-garrif he had commended, and his little patent-leathers skipped quite nimbly over the polished oak floor. It was impossible to regard him from a tragic point of view, even as the husband of Elizabeth. Warr smiled involuntarily, as he looked. But the smile died out a moment later as the plump figure of the German woman teetotumed into view, her generous proportions encircled by the arm of Lady Baintree's butler, her large, extravagantly-dressed yellow head tilted coquettishly on one side. She had not taken his warning or she would not have been there. Her presence beneath the same roof that sheltered Elizabeth was monstrous, an

outrage not to be tolerated for another instant. Warr's brows lowered, and his underjaw came out as he looked at her. His uncertainty of a moment before crystallised into determination. He moved with long strides in the direction of the glass doors which led into the main corridor of the ground floor. He would see and speak with Diana at once. The woman must go. Without scandal, of course, but immediately.

He went in through the glass doors. Heated dancers were resting on chairs and benches in the corridor, the great folding-doors of the ball-room had been opened widely for the admission of air. As Warr passed, he glanced in—was sensible of the shock of a collision amongst the wheeling couples, heard the shrill squeak of alarmed femininity, the heated expletive of indignant masculinity, heard the burst of laughter that hailed the accident,—saw a pair overset and rolling on the floor—

"Damn you! you clumsy idiot!" shrieked a lisping voice Warr knew, as the alarmed butler, profuse in apologies and perspiration, disentangled himself from the petticoats of his partner, and rushed to the assistance of the prostrate peer. "Damn you!" Rotherholme stuttered in weeping accents. "You have broken my eye-glass, and injured me internally—you have! Go away, and don't stand grinning there like a baboon!"

"Oh, my lord," began the penitent butler, "it was an accident, my lord, as your lordship knows. If your lordship would only allow me—"

"I shall get up when I choose," said the injured nobleman stubbornly, and the unfortunate butler wrung his hands in despair. But Bet the Bouncing, having picked herself up and shaken her not very

voluminous draperies into order, came to the rescue at this juncture.

"Coom oop," she said. "You bain't hurtet, not a mite. 'Tis shaked, not broken, your bones be!" And she hauled her late partner up with a stalwart arm, by what is known as the "scruff" of the neck, and the coat-collar.

Dazzled and blinking, too indignant to speak, and too much surprised to swear, Lord Rotherholme stood upright, swaying between the toes and heels of his little patent shoes. Bet dusted him down with vigour; she picked up his perfumed handkerchief and tucked it in the front of his white waistcoat. "You be as right as tuppence," she said, to the intense but suppressed delight of the grinning listeners. But Lord Rotherholme's eyes had become fixed in their sockets; a dirty ashen hue had replaced the colour brought by exercise and alcohol into his sallow little face. He did not hear. He did not seem to see. The crowd melted from about him, and left him standing, staring stupidly into the plump face of the German woman, who demurely offered him a glove which he had dropped, and she had obligingly picked up from the floor.

Warr passed on.

CHAPTER XXXI

AN INTERVIEW

LORD ROTHERHOLME went out into the courtyard through one of the windows. A moment later the German woman followed him. She found him sitting on a stone bench in a pool of split moonlight, rocking his crazy little body to and fro, and clutching his sandy little head, as though he were holding it on. She went and stood before him, so that he must see her. He shut his eyes, but when he opened them she was still there.

She said:

"Haf you noding to say to me—Richard?"

Rotherholme gulped and groaned.

"Confound you! I thought you were dead."

The woman gave a snorting laugh. He added:

"You said you were dead, you know; or they did. And now you've turned up. It's too beastly for anything."

The German said jeeringly:

"De choy—it is de choy is too motch for you. You will be bedder in a minute, Richard!"

"I've been knocked out of time, and I don't deny it," said Lord Rotherholme blankly. "I take a cold night journey—oblige my hostess by lookin' in at a beastly servants' ball. I see a filly whose action I fancy, and pop in with a proposal for the light fantastic. Somebody bangs up against us—over we go—and

lo and behold! Before I can even pick up my partner and punch the other feller's head—you pop up. You, who I've reason to believe dead and buried these ten years past. It's ridiculous, that's what it is. It's like a beastly play, or a beastly novel, or somethin' in the beastly newspapers."

"It will be in de peastly newsbabers," said Braun, with a toss of her large head, "all in goot time."

"Look here," said Rotherholme, "you're on the blackmailin' lay, ain't you?"

"I do not know," said the German woman sullenly, "what you mean."

"Look here!" began Rotherholme, after a futile wrestle with his short, sandy hair, "how much will you take to hold your tongue?"

She answered sharply and shortly:

"Twenty thaousand pounds."

"Twenty thousand shillin's," said Rotherholme, with a feeble attempt at a conciliatory grin.

"Pounds!"

"Shillin's!"

"I am your lawful wife; I have a lawful right to haf vat you haf got; though," said the German, snorting contemptuously, "you had not got ver motch when you married me."

Rotherholme growled:

"I was an infernal young fool when I married you!"

"And a young plackguard also. Don't leaf out de plackguard," advised the German. "*Ach Himmel!*" she cried, throwing out her fat hands and elevating her round eyes to the calm disdainful stars. "A pretty kind of life I lead mit you!"

"And a rosy time I had of it with you," grumbled

Rotherholme. "Don't mistake! You weren't one of the very best, take you all in all!"

"Did you not mit de cards gample efery day and all de nights? Did you not mit money back men who mit fists fought, and continually upon de running of horses bet what you call your tin?" demanded Wilhelmina. "Did you not motch brandy drink, und beat me plack und plue?"

"We're diggin' up," said the nobleman, with a slight confusion of metaphors, "we're diggin' up old sores, and I don't see there's any need to. Moreover, you weren't backward in comin' forward with your nails when needful. You've nearly scooped my eye out, before now, in one of your tantrums. And when you come to talk of liquid refreshment, you hadn't entered for the Blue Ribbon stakes when I first had the pleasure of your acquaintance—if you have now—which I am not much inclined to credit. The present question is, how much will you take to hold your tongue?"

"I haf said how motch. Twenty thau—"

"Rot! and besides, I'm the injured party. You ran away from me—collared all the cash and valuables you could find, ten years ago, and bolted—"

"I take what I could find und go back to my broder in Chairmany."

"I don't believe you've got a brother!" snarled Rotherholme.

"It matters not vat you pelieve. Den my broder say to me, 'Heart's dearest, who gave thee dose plack eyes?' Und I say it is mein hoosband—who is vot de English call a swell! And my broder say, 'Is he rich, dis hoosband?' And I say, '*Ach nein!* not now, but he vill be py and py, ven his sickly elder broder

dies.' Den my broder say, 'Oontil dat sickly broder die, lie low. Keep in de dark, and den bounce upon your hoosband like ein gad upon von mause.' "

"Fly chap that brother of yours!"

"I pelieve you! He say to me also, 'My vife in hospital sick lies. If she die, we to your hoosband vill de papers send, and say that you are dead.' So de vife dies, and we do that. Den come from England your ledder. 'Right, all right! Here is twenty pounds. Bury Lena mit dat, and go to Cherico!' "

Rotherholme laughed cackingly, wriggling in his seat.

"But Lena is not buried, nor does de broder to Cherico go. It is vait and vait, vatch and vatch,—years and years; and at last you into your money come. Den my broder say, 'Heart's dearest, a little longer vait.' I haf something in my hand, und we do so, oontil one day he to me says, '*Potstauzend!* de dime has come. It is in de newsbabers that your hoosband is going to marry anoder woman, and you shall prosecute for bigamy, or make him pay.' Und I am here to do it!" said the late Miss Braun, nodding.

"A pretty little game," said her spouse, "and I'm expected to stop your confounded mouths with twenty thousand pounds?"

"*Ach ja!*"

"Or have my present marriage made null and void?"

"*Ach ja.* Do you lofe the voman?"

"What's that to you? She's a lady, and my people are pleased," said Rotherholme suddenly.

"Den you vill pay de money?"

"Not me!"

"Den I shall tell my story!"

"Oh, confound you!"

The German woman turned upon her heel.

"Look here! What are you doing in this house?"

"I am maid to Miladi Wragge—at present."

"How did you get in with her? She's a respectable old dowager."

"My broder in Chairmany—"

"He's fly enough for anything, hang him," groaned Rotherholme. "Here's somebody coming. Get away! No! I don't mean that. You hold a full hand, and I can't afford to bluff. Give me till to-morrow."

"All right. Goot-night, und pleasant dreams," said Rotherholme's Fate with a jeering curtsy.

Then she went away.

"Lively, upon my word!" said Rotherholme, as he got up and stretched, and stood pondering with his bony little hands stuck deep in his trouser-pockets. "What's to be done? Telegraph to my solicitor first thing in the mornin'—say he's to come down at once? . . . I will! This ain't the first tough situation he's tackled, by a lot. One of the very smartest, take him all in all;—and I'm regularly dyin' for a whisky and 'polly," he ended plaintively.

CHAPTER XXXII

MIDGE PHILOSOPHISES

ELIZABETH left the ball-room with Lady Baintree. As she passed through the hall her sister caught her, and she passed her arm about the girlish shoulders, and stooped to kiss the pink cheek. "Say that you are glad to see me," she whispered. "Say that you have missed me all these months,—that you are pleased to have me back!"

"Of course I'm awfully glad and all that," said Midge. "It's very natural, isn't it, and proper that I should be?" Her blue eyes sparkled. She rubbed her head against her sister's shoulder caressingly. "Have you brought that Paris hat you promised me? Don't, don't say you've forgotten all about it!"

"I didn't forget you!" said her elder, in time to arrest the overflow of two great crystal tears. "The hat is safely packed among my things. No, don't go and ask my maid for it now. She is with the other maids in the ball-room. Sit here." She drew the girl down beside her upon the great carved hall settee near the neglected fire, that had been lighted to welcome arriving guests, and was dying out now in red embers. "I—there's something I wanted to say to you." Midge was pale, and there was a quiver in the pleading eyes that spoke of tears repressed. Midge fidgeted nervously.

"You see," she began, "I'm particularly occupied

just now. Of course you have lots of leisure on your hands—your career has been adjusted for good, as Lady Baintree says. But a poor little girl like me, without twopence in the world, can't afford to lose time, and so I'd rather talk to you to-morrow."

Elizabeth laughed, though her eyes were wet.

"Silly child, what is all this nonsense?"

"*You* didn't call it nonsense," rebuked Midge, "when you had an excellent offer of marriage made you."

"An offer of marriage," repeated Elizabeth, with wide-open eyes.

"Don't stare, as if you thought such a thing unnatural!" cried Midge peevishly.

"An offer from whom?"

"From Mr. Pope Dollimore. We were in the conservatory—just after dinner, looking at Lady Baintree's Night-blooming *Cereus*, when he proposed. And, oh! he looked so funny!" cried Midge, "gasping like one of the gold-fish in the lily-tank, and with his hair standing up all over his head."

"Are you sure? You may have mistaken."

"There is no mistake about it—none at all. He asked me whether I would render Lady Baintree happy by becoming his wife. And I said, did he really mean it, or was he joking? and he groaned, and said he was never farther from a joke in all his life. Oh!" cried Midge, bounding in her seat, "won't the pupils at Miss Pinnock's be mad with envy?"

"You—you surely don't love Mr. Dollimore?" broke in Elizabeth.

"Oh! how could any girl with a sense of the ridiculous be romantic about a roly-poly pudding with car-

rot-coloured hair?" cried Midge. "How *can* you be so absurd?"

"Then you have refused him, of course," said Elizabeth, with a relaxation of the band that had tightened about her heart, and an accompanying sense of glad relief.

"Oh! you didn't suppose a poor little pauper like me was going to say No, did you?" cried Midge gleefully. "I cried a little and asked for a few hours to reflect. And he said, certainly. And, if nothing better turns up by this time to-morrow—"

"Well?"

"I intend to accept him, that's all," trilled Midge. "And the pupils at Miss Pinnock's will be—"

She stopped short, for Elizabeth's grasp upon her arm had tightened almost painfully, and her breathing came quick and short. She spoke with a palpable effort, and her voice, when it came, was hoarse and changed.

"Midge—if I were to tell you that—for a woman who marries without caring very dearly for the man who is her husband, there is no happiness—even in having all the fine things—the jewels and the gowns that women old and young covet, would you believe me? Oh, try, my dear! Paris gowns might as well be rotten rags; princely jewels only burn and freeze the heart they lie upon; lace pillows bring no sound sleep; grand houses are squalid dungeons—to a woman who has sold herself for money. Oh, try to believe, try to unlearn all the lessons I have taught you, before your life is wasted—before your heart is broken, like the heart of a woman I know, and have learned to pity." . . .

She stopped, and bit her lip to keep down the sob that rose stiflingly in her throat.

"Now, you're upsetting yourself, all about nothing!" said Midge. "And if that woman doesn't appreciate her advantages, she deserves a judgment. How people can be so ungrateful, I don't know. Oh! what are you crying about? Shall I tell your maid to get you ten drops of sal-volatile, on a lump of sugar? Sal-volatile quiets the nerves, Lady Baintree says, and—here is Mr. Warr!"

Warr had entered noiselessly by the glass doors leading from the main portion of the house. Escape had been his first impulse, but the sound of his own name arrested him. He stopped short in the act of retreat. He was very pale, and his eyes were gleaming. Was it possible that he could have overheard?

CHAPTER XXXIII

ABOUT A LETTER

WARR murmured an apology, and vanished through the side-door which led into the smoking-room.

Elizabeth sighed.

"You look white," Midge commented.

"I feel white," Elizabeth returned, passing her hands over her face.

"It's dreadfully trying weather, Lady Baintree says," remarked Midge. "Perhaps it affects you in the same way as it does her?"

"Perhaps."

"If you were to try those six drops of sal-volatile," suggested Midge.

"I haven't come to drugging yet," said Elizabeth. "I can eat my dinner without a pick-me-up, and sleep without bromide or morphine. I have not even the consolation of knowing that I am wasting away." She glanced at her arms' fair whiteness with rather a dreary smile. Midge fidgeted a little, and bit one of her silky locks with a sulky air. She was sidling away, when her sister stopped her.

"Midge, there's something I wanted to say—a question I meant to ask—"

"You won't be long, will you?" pleaded the little one.

"No, I won't be long," said Elizabeth gravely.

"The question I want to ask is about something that happened two years ago—or nearly." She took the slight hand and drew the unwilling little figure down again on the seat beside her. "Do you remember a letter coming to Brighton—a letter with a foreign post-mark—a letter for me?"

If she had watched the varying expressions of the pretty face beside her,—noted the rush of guilty crimson that stained the fairness of the rounded cheeks, and the frightened dilatation of the pupils of the child's blue eyes—her suspicions, once awakened, would not soon have slept again. But she stared at a picture that stood out in all the vivid hues of life, mellowed and toned by age, against the panelling, the counterfeit presentment of Sir Simon Warr, represented by Lely as a handsome man of thirty, with straight, delicate features and a pointed beard, brown love-locks falling upon a collar of costly point-lace, and grave hazel eyes that looked out from the sombre shadow of a plumed cavalier's hat.

"Two years ago, did you say?" piped Midge. "Oh, how can I remember all that way back?" She tossed her hair back over her shoulders with her favourite gesture, and added, "I was in short frocks then. Oh! how tiresome you are!"

"Midge, Midge!" urged her sister, almost with a sob, "did you lose the letter?"

Midge opened her blue eyes innocently wide, and let loose a little roulade of laughter.

"How could I lose it, if I never had it? Oh, what a fuss to make, and all about an awful old letter, too."

"It was a business letter," said Elizabeth, biting her lips. "I cannot explain, but if I had received it, my

life would have been different—oh! so widely different—to-day.”

“Then you ought to be glad you didn’t get it!” said Midge sullenly.

“I can’t believe you capable of keeping it back!” Elizabeth cried. She caught the quailing child by the wrists, and lifted her from the seat and looked into the clear eyes with a sudden thrill of anger and suspicion. “Remember, people can be punished for doing things like that!”

“Oh! how can you be so cruel?” Midge whimpered. Her bosom heaved with genuine sobs, and real tears began to tumble down her cheeks. The sight pierced Elizabeth with remorse. She wiped the tears, and kissed the cheeks, and released the sufferer.

“Forgive me, dear! I didn’t mean to hurt you. There! let the matter rest. I believe you when you tell me you know nothing about the letter! I—” She kissed her sister again and moved away, her pale draperies falling round her, the firelight gleaming on her red-brown coils of hair, the great pearls gleaming about her noble throat. A sob broke from her before she could stifle it. But she set her foot upon the stair firmly, and held her head high, and went away up,—without looking back. Midge stood for a moment, crumpling her pretty fingers together, and biting at her favourite lock of hair.

“Oh! what a horrid habit things have of turning up to trouble one!” she thought. “I wonder whether people *really can* be punished for—for a little thing like that?”

The smoking-room door opened and shut. A red

head and a Scotch accent broke in on Midge's soliloquy.

"Oh, Lord Clashburnie," she cried, "I'm so glad! I've been looking for you everywhere."

"Awfully sorry," said the youth, "I've been having a quiet smoke by myself after all the bustle and fuss." He gaped, and added, "Beastly nuisance balls—especially servants' balls. One has to exert oneself because it's expected."

"How good you are," said Midge, showing her little teeth, "to set an example. I saw you dancing a schottische with such a fat girl in ribbons, and muslin that crackled, and with white cotton gloves on her great red hands. You kept falling over her feet. You couldn't help it, they took up so much room, and she kept begging your pardon, and turning all the colours of the rainbow." She clapped her hands, and gave a little jump into the air. "It was oh! so nice of you—but so funny to look at!"

The young Earl's freckles were swamped by a blush. "Now, you're chaffing," he said uneasily.

"Oh, no," protested Midge, "I thought it was splendid of you. So chiv—what do they call it in the Middle Ages, when your ancestors were polite to damsels in distress?"

"Chivalrous!" suggested the Earl.

"Chivalrous! and oh! I'm sure," said Midge, "that you would have made a splendid knight—in the way of armour and tilting, you know, for of course you are a knight already. And that reminds me that I know a girl who is a damsel in distress."

"What's the matter with her?" asked the knightly one gracefully.

"She's in a serious difficulty," said Midge, "and she wants some advice. Do you know any law?"

"I did some reading in International Law last term," admitted the Earl doubtfully, "and I've been through a course of lectures on British Jurisprudence. But I—I can't say I remember much about it. Of course it depends on what your friend wants to know, you know."

"It's dreadfully delicate and confidential," said Midge, "but I will tell her that you would rather die than betray a lady,—and I'm sure you would, wouldn't you?" she added.

"Well, you see," Clashburnie admitted reluctantly, "it would depend on the sort of lady. But if you'll tell me—what you—what she wants to know, I'll give her the best advice I can." He composed himself to listen.

"Oh, I could never tell you here," Midge said, clasping her little hands. "Somebody might listen, and then she would be lost. If we were by ourselves, in some quiet place—"

"The conservatory?" suggested the Earl.

"People are always coming in to look at Lady Baintree's Night-blooming *Cereus*," objected the little one. "Suppose we went outside just for a moment?"

"It's a lovely night, and the stars are shining like anything," said Clashburnie, with a happy touch of inspiration and a lapse from his habitual cautiousness that was due to champagne.

Midge threw a mantle about her white-robed little figure, and drew the hood over her silky hair, and they went out together. The night-air was mild, the stars made dazzling jewel-points of brightness in the black-

ish purple canopy overhead. The wind had fallen to a pleasant whisper. The couple turned into one of the paths that led through the rhododendron shrubbery down to the boat-house.

"Oh!" sighed Midge, inhaling the freshness with affected rapture.

"I say," suggested her companion, as they emerged at the lake-side, and the broad sheet of water spread itself temptingly before them, margined with its whispering beds of rushes, and reflecting the quiet brilliance of the stars, "what a night for a punt-about if the boat-house wasn't locked."

"It isn't locked," said Midge in a still, small voice.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A LEGAL INFANT

IT was an ideal night upon the water. That important question of the distressed damsel remained in abeyance as the punt glided smoothly from bank to bank. It had made three circuits of the lake before the Earl, urged by some tardy twinge of his Scotch conscience, proposed returning.

"We're in sight of the house from here, and oh!" cried Midge, "how nice it looks with all the windows lighted up. I should so like to see it from the island."

"We'll land for a moment if you like," proposed the youth.

Midge assented with an outburst of childish glee, and Lord Clashburnie ran the punt's nose into the reeds, dug the pole into the mud, leaped ashore, and held out his hand to assist his fair companion.

"The pagoda looks awful," she said, hesitating, "a regular ghost-hutch. I shouldn't wonder if there weren't heaps of bats and things. Oh—h! Something stirred in there! Aren't you afraid?"

"Afraid!" echoed the descendant of Crusaders. He went forward, and kicked the door of the pagoda open, and disappeared into the blackness of the interior.

"There's nothing there," he said, reappearing instantaneously.

"You're sure you heard nothing?"

"Only the splash of a water-hen diving, or a rat."

The speaker turned up the collar of his coat, and drew its lapels forward in the vain endeavour to cover his shirt front. "It's getting jolly cold!" he said.

"We'll go back as soon as you've answered my question, my friend's question, I mean," said Midge.

"Some difficulty with regard to a point of law, wasn't it?"

"Ye-yes. To begin: what is a legal infant?"

"A person who doesn't want to pay a tailor's bill, as a rule," said Clashburnie brilliantly. "Anybody under the age of twenty-one is an infant in law."

"I suppose I'm a legal infant then?" said Midge thoughtfully. "Do tell me, can a legal infant bring an action for breach of promise, or—or anything like that?"

"Certainly, through guardians, if the infant is unscrupulous enough," said Clashburnie with some uneasiness. "Look here, aren't you afraid of catching cold?"

"Dear no. I'm as warm as toast."

"It's more than I am," groaned the rueful cavalier, in whose veins the champagne had ceased to circulate cheerfully. "Don't you think—? Hadn't we better get back?"

"In a minute. There's another point on which my friend would like advice. It has got to do," said Midge, "with something that happened two years ago—before her education was completed. When—a—a—person—"

"Person?"

"When a person takes a letter that has been written by another person to somebody else," said Midge, "what is that called in law?"

"Stealing," said Clashburnie bluntly.

"Oh! but supposing the person acted on a proper motive!"

"People who commit improper actions," pronounced his mentor with youthful severity, "are generally prompted by proper motives. At least they tell you so. And stealing a letter is felony."

"What?"

"A felony, and punishable by imprisonment or fine."

"Oh!"

"You're shivering," said Clashburnie. "Come, we'll go back."

"One minute," pleaded Midge. "Supposing the—the person who took the letter was a legal infant? The—the law couldn't do anything to her, could it?"

"Why, yes," said Clashburnie. "It could sentence her to so many strokes with the birch-rod, or shut her up in a Reformatory. I'm almost certain of that."

Midge burst into loud and perfectly genuine sobs.

"Oh, hoo!" she wailed, oblivious of her hearer. "Oh, hoo, hoo! Oh, why did I ever meddle with the beastly thing? I mean—why did she—"

"She ought to send it back quietly to the person who wrote it," said Clashburnie, "if she has it still in her possession. And once you have given her that piece of advice, I hope you'll drop her for good. There are things one ought to draw the line at in friends. A friend may forge one's name, or copy the knot of one's necktie—and still remain a friend; but when it comes to prying into other people's private correspondence, you know; the thing's too beastly. Hallo!"

"Oh! whatever is the matter?" shrilled Midge.

"Matter! What do you think," cried Clashburnie. "The punt's gone!"

"Gone!" echoed Midge.

"The pole must have loosened and floated up and so the beastly thing has drifted before the wind. And it's night and all the men about the place are kicking about at the confounded ball—and—" Clashburnie groaned in spirit. He had suffered a relapse of his Scotch caution and the situation filled him with nameless terrors. He retreated to the other side of the island and addressed Midge from that vantage, pitching his voice over the roof of the pagoda. "I say, can you shout?"

"Oh! I think so," returned his companion. "But shouting isn't any use when nobody will hear."

Clashburnie sent a dismal bellow or two into the darkness and then left off with the conviction that nobody would. His next query was:

"Can you swim?"

"In salt water, a little," said Midge, huddling warmly in her cloak upon the sheltered side of the pagoda, "but, of course, not in evening dress. And besides, in the dark—I should be awfully frightened. And then, you know—there are slippery fish, and slimy weeds, and muddy places to wade through."

Silence ensued. Then a dejected whistle sounded from the other side of the pagoda.

"Whew! By the living gardener!" said Lord Clashburnie. "They're putting out the lights."

The flaming lower windows were darkening one by one, and sparks were seen to kindle in the frowning barrack-like façade of the bachelors' wing. Many wheels were heard to roll upon the distant drive—

wheels of omnibus-cars, waggonettes and shandrydans, bearing the revellers to their respective homes.

"I'll shout again," said Clashburnie, with a revival of hope.

He shouted and waited; shouted once more, and waited again; but no answering hail responded. Then Midge, who had ventured into the pagoda and curled herself up in a basket-chair, was startled by an ominous rustling among the reeds.

"Oh! what is that?" she cried.

There was a sullen heavy splash. A water-hen rose clacking with terror from her home amongst the lily-pads.

Clashburnie's voice answered, issuing from between chattering teeth, "Me! I'm going to swim for it. Good-night!"

CHAPTER XXXV

DIANA INEXORABLE

"I SAID I wanted to show you my boudoir," said Lady Baintree, turning up the electric lights on either side of the white mantelpiece.

"You said it had been done up, I think," remarked Pope Dollimore faintly.

"I said I was!" said Lady Baintree, sitting on a settee. "Have you been much trodden upon this evening?"

"I must admit it," said Pope.

"Think how the poor dear things enjoyed themselves, though," said Lady Baintree. As the last strains of a country dance mounted from the distant ball-room, Pope involuntarily winced, and she continued: "When I whisked you up here upon the pretext of showing you Gillow's decorations, I really wanted to know your fate. Pope, did you show Marietta Colquhoun my Night-blooming *Cereus*, as you promised?"

"I did, Diana."

"And what was the result?"

"Miss Marietta appears," said Pope, "to be lacking in appreciation of your interesting specimen of the order *cactaceæ*."

"Man! man!" cried Lady Baintree, driven beyond endurance, "did you ask her to marry you?"

Pope's fair fluffy head sank sadly upon his bosom, as he returned,

"I believe, Diana, that a request of the kind was ultimately the upshot of our interview."

"You *have* asked her to marry you?" cried Diana.

"I have."

"And she has accepted you?"

"She has deferred my—happiness until to-morrow," responded Pope.

"What can the girl be thinking of?" demanded Lady Baintree.

"Perhaps, to quote the common saying," ventured Pope, "she has another string to her bow."

"The child isn't even aware that bows can have two strings," cried Diana. "But it is culpable of her to keep you in such suspense."

"I could have wished," said Pope meekly, "to have known the worst at once." A clammy mildew seemed to have broken out upon the florid little man. His eyes were red and watery, his hair tumbled and dishevelled, his shirt damp and creasy. He pressed his hand to his brow as he spoke with an air of mild desperation.

Lady Baintree rose. "Would it calm you to take a turn in the garden?"

"With—with you, Diana?" said Pope feebly.

"We will go down by the balcony staircase," said Lady Baintree. "Precede me, because if I were to tread upon a slug, we should neither of us ever get over it."

Pope opened the window. From the ball-room, situated upon the ground-floor of the west wing, came the concluding bars of the National Anthem. The stable clock struck one.

"It is too late," said Diana. "I had no idea. Bed

would be better for you after all; and, one piece of advice, dear friend—if you meet a ghost upon your way to your room, catch hold of it, and call for me. Such apparitions, take my word for it, are best dealt with in summary fashion.” She recoiled as she spoke, and cried, “Heavens! what is that?”

Pope craned over the balcony. Something moved at the bottom of the iron staircase; a white patch, which might have been a face, was uplifted to the window.

“Oh, I beg pardon, but is anybody there?” said a curiously muffled voice.

“You had better come up,” said Lady Baintree, “and let us see who you are.”

“If I do,” returned the figure, “I shall spoil the carpet. I’m dripping wet, and awfully muddy!”

“There has been an accident of some kind!” exclaimed Lady Baintree.

The mysterious individuality climbed the iron staircase, and exhibited a white face and soaking shoulders within the radius of the electric light.

“Clashburnie!” gasped Pope.

“Lord Clashburnie!” exclaimed Lady Baintree. “What—oh, what has happened?”

“Nothing,” replied the disconsolate one; “that is to say, would you please send somebody to get Miss Colquhoun off the island?”

“Off the—”

“What island?” shrieked Lady Baintree.

“The pagoda island in the lake. She asked me to go punting by moonlight, and when I was looking for ghosts in the pagoda, she pulled up the pole, and the beastly thing drifted away,” explained Lord Clash-

burnie, with chattering teeth. "She said it was an accident—but I knew a fellow who got compromised that way, and so I thought I'd better swim," he ended.

Lady Baintree exclaimed shrilly. Her scream responded from remote regions of the house. Footsteps hurried past the door of the boudoir, running towards the staircase that led to the bachelors' wing. Lady Baintree grasped Pope's arm, rigid with apprehension.

CHAPTER XXXVI

AN ALARM AND AN INTERVIEW

THE shriek that startled Lady Baintree and Pope Dollimore had issued from the lips of Lady Caroline Wragge, who had sustained at that moment a nervous shock of a very severe description. Proceeding towards the apartments sacred to her private occupation, which were situated at the upper end of the long corridor upon which Lady Baintree's boudoir and bed-chamber also opened, she encountered what in the language of Defoe would have been designated an apparition—and spelt with a capital A.

Lady Caroline owned High Church tendencies; was a patron of St. Beewulfa in Pusey Street, W., and subscribed to a Flower and Incense Fund with intermittent liberality. She wore half-mourning in Lent, and approved of fasting, when people's constitutions were strong enough to bear it. Her own was not. She confessed to no superstitious belief in spirits, yet she objected—on principle—to ghost-stories related after eleven p.m., or at uncanny seasons, and never allowed herself to be left alone in the dark, upon any pretext whatsoever. She preferred to tread dimly-lighted corridors in the company of her maid, but upon the occasion referred to that dependent had not answered to the summons. Lady Caroline was composing, and mentally storing up a severe rebuke, to be presently administered to the recalcitrant, as she sailed along.

Perhaps her preoccupation rendered her oblivious to the approach of the thing she afterwards described between recurrent attacks of hysteria. It started up out of the ground, Lady Caroline, with more force than appropriateness, subsequently said. It wore trailing robes of a shimmering paleness, and of that bleached and unhealthy hue so largely patronised by disembodied spirits. A heavy black veil swathed its head and face, and it confronted Lady Caroline at a dimly-lighted angle of the corridor for a moment, which to that terror-stricken dowager appeared to last for ages. Then, as the recipient of the unearthly manifestation screamed shrilly, and subsided upon the Turkey carpet, the manifestation itself uttered a cry of mortal terror, and proved itself to be no ghost by scudding for dear life. A moment later, as the click of a door-lock and the opening of a door in the immediate vicinity warned the fugitive that advance meant discovery, she swerved aside, and, darting into a dressing-room, the door of which stood fortuitously ajar, sank in a panting heap upon the matting. Footsteps passed the door, hurrying swiftly; voices exclaimed, conjectured, questioned.

"I've roused the whole house," gasped Dolly. "Oh, Charles, Charles! if you only knew how frightened your poor little wife is! Oh gracious! somebody's coming in here!"

The apprehension proved groundless, yet not until Dolly, groping for a place of concealment, had found the handle of a door leading to an inner room, opened the door cautiously, and, finding the chamber to be empty, had crept in. It was, in fact, Lady Baintree's own bedroom in which the alarmed girl had taken ref-

uge. The carved walnut bedstead with its colossal baldachin, the stately dressing-table with its huge mirror—its service of silver-gilt and ivory—the portrait of the late Sir John, looking good-humouredly out of its mourning frame of ebony and silver, told the intruder as much. A door near the fireplace gave access to the boudoir. Dolly listened cautiously, and, coming to the conclusion that the boudoir was untenanted, ventured in. As she had anticipated, the room was empty, although lighted.

"Oh, how lucky!" she cried to herself, with a little gush of reviving cheerfulness, induced by the certainty that Lady Caroline had not recognised her, and the knowledge that the staircase leading to the bachelors' wing might be reached in half a dozen hasty steps. She listened again—no footstep approached; a confused hum in the distance only told of emotional disturbance in the neighbourhood of Lady Caroline's chamber. She thought of Charles, keeping tryst upon a hog-backed Saratoga trunk in the box-room, and mustered courage. She drew near the curtain that shielded the door, had her hand upon it, when it was suddenly pushed aside, and somebody—a feminine somebody—rustling in silk skirts, entered quickly.

"Oh! oh!" cried the poor ghost.

"Who—who is it?" demanded the intruder, after a moment given to the rallying of shaken wits.

"It's Elizabeth!" said Dolly, with a long breath of relief.

"Yes, but who are you?"

Dolly showed her face.

"Dolly! Dolly Garraway!"

"Yes!" said Dolly entreatingly, "but don't tell!"

"Tell me what you are doing in that dress?"

"We—we're playing at parlour proverbs."

"Parlour proverbs at one o'clock in the morning!"

"Hush! I'll explain to-morrow," whispered Dolly entreatingly.

"And in the meantime," demanded Elizabeth, "you are doing no harm? nothing—nothing in the least improper?"

"Nothing!"

"Are you quite sure?"

"Quite. Does—does this look like it?"

"It does—a little," said Elizabeth. "But you have given me your word, and—"

Something rustled past her as softly as a night-moth. Dolly had disappeared. Elizabeth moved to the open windows, and stood looking out upon the velvet darkness of the garden. The servants' ball was over. The last country dance, trodden by stout-soled revellers, had shaken the floors to their foundations—the last of the guests were dispersing. The stars were already paling, a greyness was coming in the east above the clumps of woodland and the undulating masses of the park. A furred evening wrap of Lady Baintree's lay upon an ottoman. Elizabeth threw it about her shoulders and went out upon the balcony. After a moment's silence, she became aware that someone was pacing up and down, with long, light, regular footsteps upon the gravel beneath. The glowing spark of a cigar, with its attendant aroma, announced the patroller as male. His identity was revealed in the voice that spoke her name.

"Lady Rotherholme!"

"It is Mr. Warr! Yes."

"The night, or rather the morning, is desperately chilly. Do you not run the risk of taking cold?"

"I have furs," said Elizabeth.

He stood underneath the window. The cigar he had thrown away lay like a glow-worm upon the lawn some little distance off. Elizabeth could only distinguish a pale patch in the darkness, where his face was, but she intuitively guessed the look it wore. To Warr, her features were indistinguishable, but a halo of light surrounded her, and the violet perfume of her garments reached him where he stood. He caught his breath, and his heart beat heavily. Something in Elizabeth's bosom, under cover of her costly laces, fluttered like a wild bird, and underneath the folds of the sable-lined cloak the seven rows of pearls—the Rotherholme pearls—rose and fell stormily.

"Somebody has said," thought Warr, "that more time is spent in resisting temptation than over anything else in this world. To go away now and leave her—to lose the last chance of the word, the look, the touch that I err in coveting—is not possible to me. I should waste my time in trying to do it. O God!" he said unconsciously aloud, "I'm only human!"

"What did you say?" asked Elizabeth from above.

He realised that the last sentence must have broken from him in uttered words, and blushed under cover of the kindly darkness for the weakness that had prompted them.

"I—I did not know I spoke."

"I thought you said '*Odd! unlike a woman!*' in reference to my shocking indifference to health. And I really am not cold in the least. How keen the fir scent is. That smell always reminds me of—"

Warr knew of what it reminded her.

He mounted the lower steps of the balcony staircase, and stood leaning on the rail.

"Those cliff-walks at Cannes. Do you remember? I wonder," Warr said, with an effort to be ordinary, "I wonder whether if we went back, we should find the place changed!"

Elizabeth was speaking. "I have not seen Cannes for a long time. But if we could go back—"

"If we could go back!" Warr said, with a break in his voice that jarred her memory painfully. "Oh, Elizabeth, if that were only possible!"

There was a pause, and then Elizabeth said icily:

"You ought not to have said that, you know."

"I know," Warr said hoarsely. Then a surge of anguish swept over his soul, and he cried chokingly, "But when a man's heart is breaking with pity—"

"I have no right to be pitied," returned Elizabeth. "None. I went to the altar with open eyes. You of all living men know best how deliberately I made my bargain. I did well for myself, and other women envy me. Other women envy me to-day."

Her cold, slow tones were like the drippings from a thawing snow-wreath, when the frost is setting in again.

"God help you, Elizabeth!" said Warr tremulously.

"I asked God to help me to make a great marriage," returned Elizabeth in bitter mockery. "He answered my prayer. He sent me a fitting partner—for who can call me ill-matched with any truth? My husband's brain may be a stable-loft, his heart a whisky-vault,—his soul, we'll leave souls out of the category; but what about *my* brain and *my* heart? The one's a mil-

liner's shop," she cried, yielding to the impulse of self-revelation, "a milliner's shop crammed with the latest fashionable vagaries. The other—oh! the other!—a broker's sale-room, flaring with artificial light, muddy with the footsteps of the appraising, haggling crowd—a place where everything that is best and purest and holiest in a woman's nature has been put up to auction, appraised at a money-value, and sold to the highest bidder by the woman herself!"

"Hush, hush," said Warr. "You are ill; you do not know what you are saying, my poor girl!"

"Don't treat me as a victim any more," said Elizabeth. "Realise me as I know myself. Say to yourself, when you think of me, She struck a vulgar bargain—vulgarly. She sold herself to Rotherholme body and soul. He sickens the one, and stabs the other, day by day and hour by hour. What else could she have expected, knowing what she knew? Serve her right!"

"I shall never say that while I—" Warr broke off abruptly.

"While—?"

"I was going to say while the memory of those days at Cannes remains with me," owned Warr.

"Those days at Cannes. When I behaved so sensibly!" said Elizabeth, with a laugh that was a sob. "But it is too late to talk of that."

"If that letter I wrote had reached you," said Warr, "it would not have been too late!"

"It seems a pity when one thinks of it," she returned, with another laugh.

"A pity!" echoed Warr.

"Please don't say any more." She gathered her

furs about her. He knew that she was trembling.

"You did love me—you did love me!" he broke out. "Don't deny it! Leave me that at least!"

"Oh! for God's sake, Hilary—!"

He released the cold hand he had seized, with a pang of remorse.

"I beg you to forgive!" he stammered brokenly. "I beg you to forget! . . . I will never speak of the past to you again."

"I think," said Elizabeth, "if you don't mind, I should like you to go away from here."

"Now? at once?" asked Warr, after a pause.

"To-morrow."

"I will go to-morrow," he said, and turned to leave her.

"Thank you," said Elizabeth simply.

"My leave will be up in a week, you know," said Warr, upon the bottom step.

"And you return to Teheran?"

"I return to Teheran. One moment!"

Elizabeth, who had gathered her draperies about her for retreat, paused upon the step of going. Warr spoke, gravely and simply, in tones that trembled a little, but otherwise were calm.

"Lady Rotherholme, if the future, near or far distant, holds for you trouble greater than you have known,—danger worse than any you have yet had reason to dread; sorrow bitterer, and pain more keen; if a heavier burden of remorse should weigh upon you; if the shadow of disgrace or—or shame should darken your life; if you should ever need the faithful services of a friend, will you remember me?"

"I will remember you," she said.

"I don't ask to see you," said Warr, "only to serve you. I'm no Bayard, God knows! but I would gladly take up the glove for you. A line to the Travellers' Club will always find me, or to the Consulate at Teheran. And so—good-night and good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" said Elizabeth.

He lingered. "May I take your hand?" he asked wistfully.

Elizabeth shook her head. He divined rather than saw the denial.

"No? Perhaps you are right! Good-bye!"

His steps crunched on the gravel, the darkness swallowed him. His hand had rested a moment before on the iron rail of the balustrade close to her. Elizabeth bent her head and pressed her lips upon the cold iron. It struck clammy chill to those warm, quivering lips. Elizabeth felt as though she had kissed a corpse. Then she went back into the lighted room. Warr, turning back upon the path that skirted the shrubbery for one last look, unseen, saw a woman-servant shut the window and draw down the blind.

CHAPTER XXXVII

HAIR-COMBING

DOLLY GARRAWAY, legally Mrs. Charles So-per, was fated not to reach the staircase that led to the bachelors' wing. As the curtain of Lady Baintree's boudoir dropped behind her, as she set an adventurous foot upon the Turkey carpet of the corridor, the sound of masculine voices, the noise of masculine laughter, and the smell of cigars, warned her that the attempt to gain the box-room, where her disconsolate Charles sat keeping tryst upon the Saratoga trunk, was useless. Shaking like a little wet terrier, she retreated and sought again the shelter of the boudoir.

Elizabeth still remained. She was standing on the balcony, wrapped in a fur cloak, looking out into the night. Dolly sank down upon the ottoman and panted. Then a man's voice, speaking in the garden below, brought her to her feet again. Elizabeth was replying, leaning forward upon the rail, and her interlocutor was Hilary Warr. A staircase led, Dolly knew, from the balcony to the garden. Would Mr. Warr come up? Filled with fear arising from this uncertainty, she crept once more to the door and peeped out. Foot-steps were coming along the corridor. She retreated quickly and noiselessly to the door leading into Lady Baintree's bedroom. Somebody was there. The voices of Lady Baintree and her maid were plainly to be distinguished.

"Everything seems against me," thought Dolly, with premonitory symptoms of hysteria tightening her throat and tingling in her eyes. But the thought of Charles stimulated her in the determination to make yet one more effort towards the fulfilment of the tryst in the box-room. To sit upon the ridge of a hog-backed Saratoga trunk, one's feet upon a pile of discarded door-mats, a dozen draughts whistling about one's ears, and the arm of the beloved object round one's waist, might not to another girl, Dolly reflected, represent the Alpha and Omega of bliss. But the risk—of being caught or of catching pneumonia—appealed to the late Miss Garraway. She curled herself up in a great tapestry chair, and waited, five minute, ten minutes, during which Elizabeth and Warr went on talking. No word of their colloquy reached Dolly. She yawned, and reflected that they seemed to have a good deal to say, and were certainly not flirting. Another five minutes passed away, and then Lady Baintree's hand rattled the lock of the door leading from the bedroom, Lady Baintree's voice was heard through the intervening medium of enamelled panelling, rebuking her maid for some breach of duty. If she had entered at that moment, Dolly must have been discovered. But she delayed, and Dolly, inspired by lively apprehension, had hurried to the ottoman, lifted up its movable cushion, and huddled down in the central space that cushion concealed, before the tea-gown-clad figure of her hostess appeared upon the threshold.

"You have not changed," said Lady Baintree, as Elizabeth drew back into the room. "The night-air—how imprudent! Baines, shut that window." She

sank upon the central ottoman, and stretched a hand to Elizabeth. "I am positively trembling; poor Lady Caroline! it has given me such a shock!"

"Lady Caroline is ill?"

"Not exactly; overstrained, I should say. Nerves out of order—too much green tea, between ourselves. . . . Twice daily in her bedroom, besides the ordinary occasions! And so it is little to be wondered at if she imagines things!"

"Things?"

"Ghosts, for instance."

"Did she suppose—"

"She encountered something in the corridor which she took to be—a ghost! It is quite impossible," said Lady Baintree, "because the girl Hannah Baggs, of whom I will confess I have entertained suspicions, now sleeps with Mrs. Griggs, the laundry-woman."

"My dear Diana, I must own myself confused—"

"So was Caroline. She babbled like a child, and clung to everybody quite piteously, begging them not to leave her. Did you hear anything?"

"I—I imagined I did."

"You started quite violently. Where did the sound come from?"

"I cannot quite tell. I think," said Elizabeth, "that I will go to bed."

"Change to your dressing-gown, and let your maid comb your hair here. It is quite the custom in my house—a comfortable gossip before turning in. Here are Flora Merridew and Lady Blenkinwither; I can hear the rustling of their skirts, and—" as the door opened and three ladies entered, attended by their maids. "Dearest Caroline, I am rejoiced to see you

sufficiently restored to join us!" said Lady Baintree.

"Do you allude, I beg, to what—what has occurred!" Lady Caroline whispered. She sank upon the ottoman beside Lady Baintree. One may mention that the ottoman was bottomless, and that its red sides were upheld upon castors, thus permitting a free circulation of air beneath.

"Flora, dear," Lady Baintree turned affectionately to Mrs. Merridew, "I have not had a moment to ask you—How is your husband?"

"His valet wrote to my maid quite recently, and said that he seemed extremely well."

"He is in the Highlands, I think?" said Lady Baintree.

"Or Norway; I forget which—but one or the other."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A BOLT FROM THE BLUE

THE ladies disposed themselves about the boudoir upon chairs and lounges. Deft maids extracted hair-pins and wielded brush and comb.

"Ethel, love," said Lady Baintree, addressing Lady Blenkinwith, "how well you look. So you are about to take another trip to Egypt?"

"In October," said Lady Blenkinwith languidly.

"Arthur accompanies you of course?"

"I think not. He has his own party; rather too highly-coloured and vividly mannered for my choice. Though, should we meet at Thebes, it will be interesting to compare notes," said Lady Blenkinwith.

"Notes?" echoed Lady Baintree.

"Upon our different tastes."

"Oh!" Lady Baintree turned to Elizabeth, who just then re-entered. "Is that the latest thing from Paris? How sweet! Caroline," her interest transferred itself to Lady Caroline, "do you intend to have it taken down?"

"I think not, Diana," said Lady Caroline with dignity.

"Perhaps you are right," said Lady Baintree, "not to repose too much confidence in friends." She skillfully detached and handed to her maid a plait discreetly matched to the ebon hue of her own still luxuriant tresses. "It may be you are right; but the

woman who would tell of another woman's false tail, does not deserve to live to wear a wig!"

"H'm!" Lady Caroline coughed and adroitly turned the conversation.

"Dear Lady Rotherholme, where is your maid?" she cried.

"Gossiping with the valets, I suppose," said Elizabeth with weary indifference.

"Let Braun brush your hair. She has a soothing touch."

The stout, fair German came forward, curtsying deferentially.

"If Miladi will graciously allow me—" She cast down her eyes with a look of deep humility as she took the pearl comb from Elizabeth's listless fingers and plunged it into the loosened masses of dead-leaf hair.

"Thanks," said Elizabeth, submitting to the attention. "Dear Lady Baintree, has Midge gone to bed?"

Lady Baintree started violently, pierced by a sudden recollection, and with difficulty repressed a slight scream. She signalled to her maid. "Go downstairs and inquire whether Mr. Dollimore has yet returned, and whether he returned alone?"

"Has anybody seen my Dolly?" inquired Lady Caroline, as the maid went upon her errand.

"She must have gone to bed," said Lady Baintree. "Young girls ought not to sit up late. And I think I heard her mention toothache early in the evening."

"I will carry her the camphorated chloroform," said Lady Caroline, rising.

"Miladi," the German spoke with demure self-possession and respectful eyes bent modestly upon

the carpet, "the Fraulein Dolly begged not to be disturbed."

"Quite right," agreed Lady Baintree. "There is nothing like rest for nervous troubles, and—" she advanced her lips to Lady Caroline's ear. "Have you turned over that suggestion of mine?" she breathed.

"Oh!" Lady Caroline palpitated. "Do you allude to—to what you were saying with regard to Captain Soper?"

"Caroline, don't deny it," commanded Lady Baintree. "You feel strongly attracted towards that young man!"

"Diana, I—"

"Think how happy you would be if you were to marry him and settle down together snugly in the country. You might make him sit as Member for somewhere or other and support some inoffensive measure—the more humane shoeing of horses, for example, or a new method of metalling roads—"

"Really, Diana—"

"Think how happy you would make his mother," urged Lady Baintree, warmed to enthusiasm, as was her wont, by the slightest manifestation of opposition. "Caroline, if you leave this house without coming to a definite understanding I never shall forgive you!"

"But I don't see how—" pleaded the bewildered Caroline.

"Who ever does see how?" exclaimed Lady Baintree. "Take him into the conservatory to-morrow evening after dinner; show him my Night-blooming *Cereus*, and tell him that your property is absolutely

unentailed. If he doesn't take the hint he's an idiot! Merciful Powers! what was that?"

Both Lady Caroline and Lady Baintree sprang to their feet. The sound that had alarmed them was of a peculiar gurgling description—it might be described as an explosive splutter. And it issued from the ottoman upon which both ladies had been seated. The alarm spread. All the occupants of the boudoir left their seats more or less tumultuously, and rushed into Lady Baintree's bedroom, the nearest harbour of refuge to be gained. The terrified maids joined in the general exodus. The room was emptied—void—in the twinkling of an eye.

Lady Baintree bolted the door and leaned against it, panting.

"What could it have—" began the terrified Lady Caroline.

"A burglar. Don't scream all at once!" implored Lady Baintree.

CHAPTER XXXIX

LADY BAINTREE GOES TO BED

[EANWHILE the cushion-lid of the ottoman tilted up; its occupant emerged, flushed and levelled.

I knew I should do it," sobbed Dolly. "Oh! what awful night I'm having." She pulled the veil over face and hurried out as the first pioneers of an evening party—Lady Baintree and Lady Rotherie—reappeared upon the threshold of the bedroom.

Might it not have been a cat?" conjectured Dolly.

How could a cat get under the ottoman?"

How could a man, if you come to that?"

The top lifts up; it would be comparatively easy." "Ring!"

Call the gentlemen!" urged the frightened ladies, standing in the doorway. But at that juncture a ringing, high-pitched scream resounded from the corner. Lady Caroline, Lady Blenkinwith, Mrs. Mereworth, and the maids shrieked for sympathy. Elizabeth stood pale but silent.

That was not a cat," pronounced Lady Baintree. Human squall, if ever I heard one. Ah!"

Muffled entreaties and ejaculations of a piteous sort were to be distinguished. The sounds came nearer. Lady Baintree, spurred by a sudden idea, moved to the

door opening on the corridor, pushed it open, and looked out.

"I knew it," she exclaimed. "The ghost!"

"Ghost!"

"The ghost that scared Pope Dollimore three nights ago. The apparition that nearly sent you into fits, Caroline, this very night. And," said the Lady of Westwood, with determination, "if I do not make an example of that audacious girl, my name is not Diana Baintree. Have you got her safe, Hilary?"

Warr's voice responded in the affirmative.

"Bring her here," commanded Lady Baintree. Then as a veiled and muffled figure was led into the room in the custody of Hilary Warr and Lord Rotherholme, she added sternly, "You see, Baggs, what comes of being found out."

"Pray, pray listen," whispered Elizabeth hurriedly. "It's not—"

"It is," pronounced Lady Baintree. "My still-room maid, Hannah Baggs. She came with half a character—she will go without the vestige of one. Show your face," said Lady Baintree, addressing the quivering culprit in her most awful tones, as the pale and startled face of Captain Charles Soper appeared in the doorway. "Show your face, you unblushing girl!"

"We'll have off that head-clothin'," said Lord Rotherholme, extending a rather shaky hand. "Steady!"

The captive uttered muffled moans. "No, no!"

"Take off that thing, you impudent creature!" cried Lady Baintree, now thoroughly roused.

"Woa! gently does it," exclaimed Rotherholme. He suppressed a hiccup, and snatched at the veil, when a

push from a powerful arm sent him reeling to the wall.

"Leave my wife alone!" said Captain Charles, in husky but determined accents.

"Your wife?" shrieked Lady Baintree.

"Yes, my wife!" said the Captain, as Dolly, blushing and trembling, lifted her veil, and Lady Caroline, with a shrill exclamation of wrath and consternation, subsided on the ottoman, "Mrs. Charles Soper. We were married at the registrar's in the middle of last May."

"In Heaven's name, what has happened, Diana?" cried Pope Dollimore, joining the exclamatory circle.

"Happened!" echoed Lady Baintree. "This miserable girl is married. Dolly Garraway is Dolly Soper—and Caroline is in a critical condition." Her glance fell upon Pope's boots, and travelled upwards to his knees. "Man," she exclaimed, "you are covered with mud. What have you been doing?"

"I have—in company with one of the under-gardeners," returned Pope cautiously, "been employed in rendering, at your request, a service to a young lady in distress. In other words, I have been getting Miss Midge Colquhoun out of the pagoda on the island in the lake. I have reason to believe that she has suffered no serious chill, and that—as the housekeeper—who has undertaken to administer warm brandy, and a mustard bath—expresses it, she will be as lively as a cricket in the morning."

"If nobody else has any more bad news to break," said Lady Baintree, with the calmness of despair, "I think we had better go to bed!"

CHAPTER XL

DISPERSAL

LORD CLASHBURNIE came down to breakfast early upon the following morning. He wore a suit of travelling tweeds, and was suffering from incipient catarrh.

Early as he was, others had been before him. The Dean of Bagley had returned to the charge of his fold. Lady Blenkinwith and Mrs. Merridew had each received an urgent summons to town.

"I know what that means," Lady Baintree had said, when their affectionate notes of farewell and apology were brought her with her matutinal tea. "Scandalmongers of the first water, both of them. And it will be a race between them—who shall be first to tell."

"You will remember my message to your mistress," said Lord Clashburnie, helping himself to kidneys. "Suddenly called away upon business of importance." He impaled a kidney upon his fork, and reddened to the roots of his brickdust coloured hair. "And—there's one of the ladies staying in this house—a young lady, Miss Colquhoun—I'm particularly anxious—" The young peer stammered, and broke down.

"Shall I take a message up, my lord?"

"Hang you, no! It's the other way." He slipped a sovereign into the butler's ready palm. "I'm particularly anxious not to meet her. Keep your eye on

the door, and warn me if you hear her coming. Ssh! Here is somebody."

"Only Mr. Pope Dollimore, my lord."

Pope wore a shooting suit of loudish pattern, a check of greenish-brown and mustard colour. His fair fluffy hair was rumpled, and his plump round face was woefully puckered. He had spent a restless night. He bade Lord Clashburnie a reserved good-morning, and helped himself languidly to chowder.

"Going out with the guns?" asked the red-headed youth.

"I am going with the Early Express," Pope answered, with some stiffness. He addressed the servant—"Kindly order a conveyance to be ready to take me to the station in ten minutes' time."

"The dog-cart, sir, or the automobile?"

"Whichever is most convenient. You will please inform Lady Baintree that Mr. Pope Dollimore was suddenly called to town—upon unavoidable business. He deeply regretted the necessity of leaving without a formal farewell." Pope had not had the courage to risk an interview with Diana by acquainting her in written terms with his determination to depart. He beckoned the butler to his side, and said in tones that were husky with emotion: "Can you inform me whether Miss Colquhoun has yet left her room?"

"Not yet, sir. It seems," the butler explained, "that the young lady have enjoyed a bad night's rest."

"So have I," thought Pope.

"And has an 'eadache this morning."

"And so have I," thought Pope again.

"Perhaps you would wish to send a message—?"

"Not for the world!" breathed Pope.

"The young lady leaves this afternoon, sir," said the butler's coadjutor, who until now had remained apart, presiding over the display of cold viands on the sideboard.

"Leaves!" Pope echoed.

"Going back to boarding-school at Brighton, sir, I understand. My lady telegraphed to the mistress—a Miss Pinnock, or some such name—this morning, to prepare her."

Pope's eyes, rounded with undisguised gratification, encountered those of Lord Clashburnie, above the rim of his coffee-cup.

"Dear me!" he said, withdrawing them in confusion. "This is—a sudden—! I regret—ahem!—excessively—" He beckoned once more to the butler. "You need not give that message to your mistress, after all, Jelliman," he said. "I have changed my mind. I think of going out with the guns, after all!" The dog-cart was announced at this juncture. Pope bade Lord Clashburnie an effusive farewell. He accompanied him to the doorstep, and saw his portman-teaux put into the vehicle with a solicitude that was almost paternal. Then he returned to finish his breakfast, humming a tune.

Two more guests in travelling-attire were seated at table, in the persons of Captain and Mrs. Charles Soper. The Captain was stolid and gloomy; his bride still hysterical and nervous.

"My friends, my poor young friends!" exclaimed Pope sympathetically, hurrying forward with outstretched hands.

"You know our sad news, then?" said Dolly whimperingly.

"I—I was present when you—that is—upon the occasion—I should say last night," Pope returned with some confusion.

"You will be sorry to hear," said Dolly, drying her eyes with a foolish little cobweb of a handkerchief, "that we are just starting on our honeymoon!"

"Indeed," said Pope. "Where do you think of going?"

"Brompton," said Captain Charles shortly.

"You—you really ought to see Brompton, you know," said Pope, after a moment of painful hesitation. "What—what particular part have you pitched on?"

"That's not quite settled," said the bridegroom; "I have been thinking of a place I used to know; nice quiet lodgings in a square near the Barracks."

"I had rather die than live in nice quiet lodgings in a square near the Barracks," the bride retorted warmly.

"Look here," said Captain Charles, carving ham, as Pope retired in confusion, "you know that beggars mustn't be choosers. And you took me for better or worse."

"I did," wailed Dolly; "but I didn't know it was going to be all worse, and no better. Oh! how can you be so cruel as to carve ham—like a marble image—when I am so utterly miserable!"

"You've got to eat something," said the bridegroom, handing her a plate.

"Oh! why?"

"Because if you should happen to be hungry before we get up to town—" Captain Charles disconsolately rattled a bunch of keys against a few loose coins in

his trousers' pocket, "you'll have to put up with a bun, that's all."

"Never breathe the name of buns to me again!" broke out the bride, with a sudden recollection of the wedding-breakfast.

"Look here, darling, don't be so awfully dismal!" implored the warrior, for whom the future yet possessed a certain amount of charm. "If I knock off cigars, and pegs, and cards, and—and betting—we may manage to scrape along."

"Scrape is such an awful word!" sighed Dolly.

"Of course you'll have to wear out all your old frocks," pursued Charles, with a brow corrugated by care.

"As far as frocks go," sighed Dolly, "Braun has left me without a rag, and as to getting any new ones, unless I turn an honest penny by taking in officers' washing, or giving music lessons, or something of that kind—I—Oh! here's Midge!"

Midge tripped in with a morning face of the freshest, and if possible, a more charming air of childlike innocence than usually distinguished her. She kissed Dolly, and referred to her red eyes and generally disconsolate air.

"Goodness! whatever is the matter?" she cried.

"I—I'm a little upset," Dolly owned.

"Of course," cried Midge, with a pretty air of comprehension and commiseration. "It's only natural you should be upset when you have forfeited your fortune, and are going away in disgrace!"

"Disgrace!" echoed Dolly indignantly.

"Weren't you awfully cramped inside that ottoman, dear?" Midge asked ingenuously.

"Perhaps," Dolly admitted; "but not cold as you must have been on the island, darling."

Midge spoke to the servant, and turned the conversation out of its too retrospective channel.

"Please send somebody to find Mr. Pope Dollimore," she said. "He wants to speak to me so very particularly this morning."

"He was here a minute ago," said Dolly, "and ran away, I think, when he heard you coming. And Lord Clashburnie left to catch the Early Express, and—I suppose the pupils at Miss Pinnock's will be awfully glad to have you back again amongst them—won't they, pet?"

"Oh! there is Mr. Dollimore," cried Midge, jumping up.

Pope was to be descried in the act of crossing the lawn with his gun under his arm. Midge abandoned her unfinished breakfast, an unusual sign of pre-occupation on her part, and ran out of the room in pursuit of the fugitive a moment before the entrance of Lady Baintree.

CHAPTER XLI

THE GODDESS LEAVES THE MACHINE

"I SAY!" exclaimed Charles, "I never knew old Pope could run before. There he is, cuttin' over the lawn like anything. Hullo!" He whistled appreciatively. "The little un's gone after him. Loo! Loo! Three to one she pulls him down!" He rattled keys and small silver in depleted pockets, and his round pink face relaxed into a dejected expression. "Forgot! Must knock off betting now," he groaned, "with cabs, and cigars, and pegs, and things." He went to the sideboard, and mixed a brandy and soda. "The last—the very last!" he muttered, and drained the beaker to the memory of bachelor days, as the *châtelaine* of Westwood swept into the room.

The meteorological index of Diana's eyebrows pointed to stormy weather, and the very rustle of her skirts sounded a note of alarm in the ears of the wedded culprits who strove to sustain her glance. Both looked limp and forlorn. One might have imagined Hymen in the background blowing in vain upon a smoky torch, and Loves fostering chilblained knuckles in despair under wings ruffled by withering blasts of cold discouragement. But with all the disadvantages attendant, the situation had interest for Lady Baintree. Here were two people who had, however inadvisedly, done what everybody ought to do. She threw off her frigid mask of dignity, mounted

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her hobby, and that well-trained animal ambled away with her on the spot.

She shook her finger.

"Oh, you babes! You idiotic, improvident, unworldly babes!" she cried.

"We know we've done very wrong," Dolly began timidly.

Lady Baintree stopped her.

"You have! Come here and kiss me directly." She embraced the bride, and held out a disengaged hand to the bridegroom. "Rash boy! What I'm to say to your poor dear mother I do not know. Dolly, my child, I fear you have alienated your Aunt Caroline for ever."

"Oh, so do I!" sighed Dolly.

"Have you made no effort—?"

"Effort," Dolly repeated, under puzzled eyebrows.

"To bring about a reconciliation?"

"Soothe the old lady down, you know!" put in Charles.

"I—I went to her room last night," Dolly faltered, "when things had quieted down a little."

"Well?"

"I knocked, and asked if I might come in."

"You ought to have gone in without stopping to ask," said Lady Baintree.

"I didn't dare. If you'd ever seen Aunt Caroline in her nightcap—"

"I have, and it is—well?"

"She locked her door, and disowned me through the keyhole. She is going to make a new will at once, she says, and die of something very rapidly in order to prove to me what disastrous consequences are entailed

upon stubborn and undutiful young women, who persist in running counter to the authority of their legal guardians. She means to divide my twenty thousand pounds between the Asylum for Idiots and the Home for Lost Dogs!" Dolly ended hysterically.

"And so we were going to creep away quietly this morning," said the crestfallen Charles.

"Creep away!" echoed Lady Baintree.

"Into some dreary respectable hole or other," explained Dolly, "where we can starve without attracting too much attention. Charles prefers Brompton."

"Brompton!"

"It's near the Barracks," growled Charles.

"You are not serious?"

"No, we're desperate. The plan is—"

"Madness!" ejaculated Lady Baintree. She fixed her hearers with a kindling eye, and struck a spirited attitude. "Beat a retreat!" she cried. "Never! Caroline must be brought round. She shall be."

The soft respectful voice of her butler speaking at her elbow recalled her from the mazes of the labyrinth of strategy into which she had mentally plunged. His salver bore upon its argent field a card; "Adolphus Jelf, Solicitor, 30, Old Mortality Buildings, Lincoln's Inn," was the legend inscribed upon it. Lady Baintree bent her brows; Adolphus Jelf was one of the unknown. She queried of his personal appearance.

"Middle-aged, dry gentleman, my lady," said the butler. "A lawyer, I make bold to think. Said he had come down special from London to see the Marquess of Rotherholme. Telegraphed for, I understand. One of the grooms was prevented from going to bed last night, or rather this morning, by his lordship's

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orders, and sat up in the harness-room until it was light enough to saddle and ride into Bagley-Westwood with the message."

"If so," said his mistress, "why do you not show the gentleman into the library, and take the card to Lord Rotherholme?"

The butler submitted the fact that his lordship was already in the library. His lordship had passed the night in that apartment in company with a decanter of whisky and a syphon of soda-water, and was at that moment asleep on the sofa.

"Then show Mr. Jelf into the morning-room, and ask him whether he will take breakfast or lunch?" said Lady Baintree.

"Very well, my lady. Begging your pardon, my lady, what is to be done respecting the young German person who is not to be found?"

"Not to be—?"

"She has been missing, my lady, since seven this morning."

"Do you allude to Lady Caroline Wragg's German maid?"

"Yes, my lady; and her mistress has been ringing perpetual for the last half hour."

"Has no one told her that the woman has disappeared?" queried Lady Baintree.

"Yes, my lady, but her ladyship declines to credit the fact. She announced her intention, my lady," said the butler, "of staying in bed until the young person returns."

Lady Baintree lifted hands and eyes in tragic despair.

"There is a curse upon this house!" she said. The

distant trill of an electric bell lent emphasis to the assertion.

"Oh, what is it?" cried Dolly, as the man of bins retired.

"That woman Braun has taken French—I should say, German leave," said Lady Baintree, "and left your Aunt Caroline in ruins upstairs. That is the long and the short of it." Then her countenance glowed with the light of a brilliant inspiration. "How fortunate! How fortunate!" she exclaimed, and kissed the palpitating little bride with an outgush of motherly congratulation.

"Oh, how is it fortunate?" cried Dolly, while Captain Charles twisted his moustache with a puzzled air.

"Is it possible you don't comprehend?" Diana cried. "Child—children both—here is the chance I was hoping for—dropped from the skies into your laps! There goes Caroline's bell again. If it was one of the old-fashioned arrangements with a rope attached, she would have had it down long ago. Listen!"

The bride and bridegroom listened to the whirring tinkle that spoke of Lady Caroline's despair, but as yet the glow of Lady Baintree's inspiration had not communicated itself to their countenances. Then Lady Baintree rose in majesty.

"Behold!" she cried, or employed a more modern word to that effect. "Caroline is in bed, and in bed she will have to stop until somebody can be found who is capable of patching her up so as to be presentable. Elizabeth's maid can't; my maid sha'n't—not to put too fine a point upon it. Child!" she grasped Dolly

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sternly by the shoulder, "do you think at a pinch you could put the old lady together again?"

"I've seen it done," said Dolly, trembling.

"Then be brave, courageous, daring," said Lady Baintree. "When Caroline has rung until she is exhausted—when she is in complete despair—there's your opportunity to effect a reconciliation. Let the sixth peal from now be the signal for the plunge. Number one has just gone off! Fly!" She waved Dolly imperiously from the room, and bundled Charles impetuously after her. "Follow your wife, and report progress from the bottom of the stairs," she cried, and sank exhausted into a chair. "Never in the whole course of my life have I had such a morning as this! Ah-h! I hear voices!"

CHAPTER XLII

THE WORM TURNS

THE sound of distant voices raised in parley can hardly be admitted to have reached Lady Baintree's ear. She hung upon conjecture one whirling minute. Then the door was cautiously opened, and the head of Captain Charles appeared in the aperture.

"Well?"

"She's knocking at the door," said Charles, and vanished.

"My poor heart!" moaned Lady Baintree. The minutes went by—the door-handle turned—there was a recurrence of the previous phenomenon.

"What is happening?" Diana cried.

"They're arguing through the keyhole—"

"And—?"

"The old lady positively refuses to let her in!"

"Cat!" hissed Lady Baintree.

Charles disappeared, to reappear radiant.

"Has Caroline—what, you don't mean—?"

"She's let her in," exploded Charles. "Hurrah!"

The door banged for the third time.

"Hurrah!" echoed Lady Baintree, oblivious of dignity. She fanned herself with the morning paper, and pressed her handkerchief to her heated brow. Never in the whole course of her experience had she spent a more trying morning.

"I must be frightfully dishevelled," she murmured,

and stretched a hand to the bell. But before she could summon her maid a hand touched her shoulder; a hollow voice uttered her Christian name.

"Diana!"

"Heavens! Pope, how you made me jump."

Pope, heated and dishevelled, and panting as though from a hard run, waved his hands wildly, and essayed to speak. Lady Baintree sprang to her feet.

"Something has happened!"

"Everything has happened, Diana."

Pope had now collapsed in a chair. His light blue eyes were starting from his head; his flaxen hair was rumpled; his necktie a mere rag. If the Conservative electors of Bagley-Chitwell had seen their Parliamentary representative at that moment, their confidence would have tottered to its base. He blinked and gasped. Lady Baintree swept him with a glance, from his topmost tuft of hair to the lowest button of his gaiters.

"You have been peppered with shot," she exclaimed.

"Would that were all, Diana!" Pope groaned.

"You have been chased by one of my bulls!"

"I am pursued by something worse than an infuriated bull, Diana," Pope returned. He seized a milk-jug, emptied the contents into a cup, and drained the vessel at a draught.

"Oh—what?" screamed Lady Baintree.

"Fate bears down upon me," said Pope wildly. "Fate, relentless and implacable. My doom, matrimonially speaking, has been sealed—for the third time—by the hand of my dearest friend." He tottered to his feet. "Woman!" he cried, "for I can call

you nothing else—! Why did you compel me to offer marriage to—to that immature she-dragon?"

Diana closed her eyes.

"Is it possible that you allude to Midge Colquhoun?" she murmured faintly.

"To the younger sister of Lady Rotherholme; you guess aright," Pope responded.

"This is a bad dream!" said Lady Baintree.

"I wish it were," said Pope. "The most unpleasant nightmare that ever haunted the—the pillow of—of an alderman—would be preferable in comparison with the reality that appals me now."

"I meant for the best, Pope," groaned Lady Baintree.

"For the best!" Pope echoed, with a hollow laugh. "Ha! ha!"

The scared woman put up pleading hands.

"I implore you, not that awful laugh. Oh! I never dreamed you capable of taking such a tone with me—who—who have always acted for the best—"

"For the best!" cried Pope Dollimore, clutching at his strangling collar. "She has acted for the best!" He seemed to expand and elongate before the terrified gaze of Lady Baintree. "In tying human lives in knots," he cried, "which can only be disentangled by death—or a *decree nisi*—in condemning conjugal martyrs—by bakers' dozens—to drag out their ill-matched existences unpeacefully side by side! In boiling hot water for other people to get into, and in cooking kettles of fish for the delectation of Society at large—this misguided matrimonial enthusiast has acted for the best! Ho! ho!"

The little man had become positively fiendish. His

glance skewered the victim quaking before him. She writhed and moaned feebly.

"Don't look at me like that!"

"The moment has come," said Pope, repressing the impulse to pity and to spare, "the moment has come when you must learn the truth. From the lips of a man whom you have immolated—not once—but twice upon the altar—you shall hear it."

"Don't put it too strongly," Diana urged, in accents Pope had never heard issue from those resolute lips before. "Remember—remember I am only a single woman!"

"You have done enough damage," Pope said sternly, "to be sixty single women! You have numbered your victims by thousands—piled your holocausts mountains high. The records of your triumphs are the annals of the Divorce Court—your most conspicuous successes are those glaring failures which have not yet been made evident to the world, but will be—but will! Possessed by a frenzy for matchmaking, which has rendered you callous to conviction, impenetrable by proof, blind to bare facts and impervious to expostulations, you have pursued unchecked your wild career, wreaking ruin and dealing devastation upon every side."

Breathless he sank into a chair on the other side of the table. Lady Baintree yielded to tears.

"You—you talk as though I were a runaway locomotive," she faltered, from the refuge of her handkerchief. "Oh! Pope, I may have been wrong—headstrong—inconsiderate—obstinate—I'm beginning to believe it—but I will reform. Only show me how to undo some of the—the harm I have done—and—I—I shall bless you as long as I live." Tears impeded

her utterance. Her stateliness had vanished, her icy dignity melted away, as she bowed her humbled brow upon the damask table-cloth.

"You cannot atone by putting your head in the butter, Diana!" said Pope, fixing her with a glassy stare.

Lady Baintree sat up and dried her eyes. The inevitable reaction had taken place. Her confidence in herself had been sorely shaken, her pride in her hobby had suffered an upset; but it had picked itself up, shaken the dust from its garments, and needed but a word of friendly encouragement to induce it to remount.

"After all," she said, "you are making, not a mountain out of a mole-hill, but a volcano out of a mud-pie. That girl—in whom I own I am miserably disappointed!—goes back to boarding-school to-day. I have telegraphed to prepare Miss Pinnock for her arrival, and if any question of the propriety of the step I have taken should arise, I am prepared to make a full explanation to Elizabeth. You are all right!"

"I am all wrong," returned Pope. "Miss Marietta Colquhoun goes back to boarding-school as my affianced bride—unless a merciful Providence intervenes. You seem to have forgotten that you forced me to propose to her last night in the conservatory."

"She—she did not give you any definite answer!"

"The crushing blow of a complete acceptance," said Pope mournfully, "levelled me to the ground—mentally speaking—a few minutes before I entered this room. Diana," he cried, with an accent of strenuous appeal, "you and you alone can save me!"

"The pagoda incident—" Lady Baintree began.

"The pagoda incident will be explained away. She—that girl—is capable of explaining anything. I—I must be placed beyond reach—I must be girdled with a rampart of moral and physical inaccessibility." Pope's former symptoms were returning. "One step on your part, Diana—and that happy immunity from peril is gained."

"Show me that step," she said, "and I will take it, as sure as my name is Diana Baintree."

Pope made this astonishing rejoinder. "If you make it, your name will be Diana Baintree no longer—unless you prefer to retain your title by courtesy."

"Man! what do you mean?" demanded Lady Baintree.

"Marry me yourself, Diana!" said Pope Dollimore.

CHAPTER XLIII

DIANA IS VANQUISHED

"MARRY—you?"

No adequate idea can be conveyed by the feeble pen of the tone employed by Lady Baintree in the utterance of the two words.

"Marry me yourself," echoed Pope, "as quickly and strongly as the thing can be done!"

Diana's eyebrows conveyed the blankest perplexity. She scanned Pope with her glance, from his flaxen top-knot to his shooting-boots, and a sudden idea occurred to her. His head must have given way. Why had she not thought of that before?

"Pope, my poor dear," she said, "your trouble has turned your brain."

"Save me then," he said, "from hopeless lunacy. Be my wife."

"Impossible!" Diana cried.

"Why impossible?" queried Pope stoutly.

"Oh!" She put her hand to her brow. "Why, I have known you ever since you were a stammering boy in knickerbockers."

"And I have been—may I say fondly?—attached to you since you were a frolicsome girl in short frocks." Pope's eyes were watery, and he stuttered between eagerness and embarrassment. "I—I fought Granger Dorwen when we were spending the summer holidays at Warr Court, because he stole your photograph—

and got the worst of it. You came upon us after the battle, Diana, and scolded us for being such blood-thirsty savages. Yet only the previous day you had expressed to me your hatred and scorn of a boy who could not fight—on occasion. All our lives long we have occupied positions relatively the same. . . . I have taken your advice,” said Pope, “have found myself—to quote from the vocabulary of the Prize Ring—in Chancery—and had to bear your reproaches as well as—other consequences. Do you owe me no reparation?”

“If you had ever given me to understand by the faintest possible allusion—” began Lady Baintree.

“Oh, Diana,” said the little man, “be candid! You have known it all along, and there have been moments when I—when I have almost spoken out. Twice, if my memory serves me, I have ventured to hint at a possible union between us; but on the first occasion you handed me over to Jane—and upon the second, if I may use the expression—you choked me off with Charlotte.”

“A second marriage—and with you!” murmured Lady Baintree. “I never dreamed of such a possibility.”

“I know,” returned Pope, “that you did not.” He clasped her waist; it did not avoid his embrace. He ventured—timidly but fervently—to kiss her on the cheek. “Dream of it now, Diana!” he pleaded. “Let it be my pleasing but painful task to convince you that wedded life is *not* altogether—ahem—a path of roses.”

“Let it be *my* task,” burst forth Lady Baintree, “to prove to you that conjugal existence can be conducted upon lines at once harmonious and agreeable!”

"Diana," Pope cried, with a flush of incredulous joy, "can it be that you are really—"

She turned and gave him both her hands. "I am going to try and make up to you," she said, "for Jane and Charlotte, too."

"I must tell Warr of this," said Pope, after a pleasant pause. "I have not seen him this morning."

Warr's step sounded on the hall parquet at that moment—his hand opened the door. He was pale and weary-looking, his eyes were more hollow, the lines upon his wide forehead and the grey threads in his brown hair and beard more apparent to his cousin than they had ever seemed before. Pope's rapturous gush of revelation was sealed within his lips by the haggard despair in the eyes that met his own.

"What—is anything wrong, my dear Warr?" he said in dismay.

"Nothing is wrong," Hilary returned, "except that I am obliged to forfeit the rest of my pleasant holiday, and return to town this morning."

"Excuses and departures seem to be the order of the day," said Lady Baintree in vexation. "You are the fifth deserter since breakfast, and the house-party has dwindled to a mere handful. Is your business desperately pressing?"

"Unavoidably so," Warr said.

"You hinted nothing to me of the probability of your being summoned."

"In point of fact I got the route last night," said Hilary, "and, in consequence, shall start for Persia a week earlier than I anticipated." He kissed his cousin warmly, and grasped Pope's hand.

"This cannot be farewell," said Lady Baintree.

"We shall see you again before you leave England?"

"I am afraid not," said Warr.

In the midst of Diana's exclamations of consternation and reproach, a servant announced the dog-cart. Hilary finished his leave-taking and hurried out of the room. It seemed a cheerful, sunny kind of morning upon which to endure the pangs of such an agony of longing and regret as rent his breast, as he drew on his gloves, while his portmanteaux and gun-cases were being stowed in the light cart, driven by one of the grooms, and usually employed for the purpose of transporting masculine baggage. Warr finished buttoning his gloves, and went slowly down the steps. His hand was upon the reins the groom offered. His foot was upon the step of the cart, when a light hand touched his arm—a bird-like voice thrilled in his ear.

"Oh, please wait one minute. I want to speak to you quite awfully," said Midge Colquhoun.

CHAPTER XLIV

A CONFESSION

WARR assented. They crossed the lawn side by side, and turned into a narrow green alley that led to the garden. At the end of it was a Judas-tree, a rustic seat beneath its drooping branches. The little one sat down, her dainty frills fastidiously guarded from contact with the dust, a pink flush coming and going upon the wild-rose face beneath the Paris hat—a hard, calculating look in the blue eyes that were studiously turned from Warr. He wondered what the tiny creature was going to say. Something in the colour of the delicate ear turned towards him, in the modelling of the profiled lips, reminded him of Elizabeth. He bit his lip and clenched his hand. Midge attributed the gesture to impatience.

"I don't think it's polite of you to grudge a moment of your time to a young lady," she said, with a little quiver of wounded vanity in her voice; "but I suppose catching a train comes before everything with some men."

"I am in no particular hurry to catch mine," responded Hilary with an attempt at a smile; "and you are welcome to as much of my time as you may choose to commandeer."

"Oh, I shall not detain you long," said Midge with a tilt of her pretty chin. "I only wanted to say—to ask—" She broke down in a whimper.

"Yes," said Warr, with an impulse of sympathy. "What was it you wanted to ask?"

"I wanted to ask you first of all to promise on your honour as a gentleman that you will never, never repeat what I am going to tell you."

"As far as secrecy goes," said Warr, with a faint smile, "I can be relied upon to be as silent as a sarcophagus."

"Then, in absolute confidence, you know—," said Midge, sketching freehand outlines in the gravel with the toe of her little shoe.

"In absolute confidence," Warr echoed lightly. But her next sentence killed his dawning sense of amusement in her childish airs of importance.

"Do you remember more than two years ago, writing a letter to my sister, Lady Rotherholme?"

There was a pause. Warr's heart was beating wildly, and the garden-beds, rich with deep-hued autumn flowers, whirled like kaleidoscopic patterns before his dazzled eyes. Then he heard himself answering, apparently from some distance off, "She was not Lady Rotherholme then. What of the letter?"

"She—she never got it, you know," said Midge.

Warr raised his heavy eyes and looked at her. The magnetic power of his glance drew round the shrinking face to meet his own. The blue eyes contracted and dilated shiftily, the pretty mouth quivered, the little culprit began to weep.

"My God!" cried Warr hoarsely. "You stole the letter!" He caught both the frail wrists in his hand and pulled the girl to him almost fiercely. Then he dropped her hands and stood up. "I beg your pardon if I have been rough," he said, striving at composure

between his panting breaths; "but you have driven me beside myself. Do you know that you have committed a crime?"

"Oh! how awfully severe you are," whimpered Midge, bringing her little pocket-handkerchief into play. "My name was on the—the outer envelope," she sobbed, "and we are all liable to make mistakes."

"All!" said Warr, with a blank realisation of the futility of rebuke or expostulation addressed to one of the tortoiseshell butterflies hovering over the late verberna beds. "Go on!"

"And so—I peeped inside." A blue eye twinkled behind its cambric shelter. A hysterical giggle diversified the monotony of Midge's woe. "It—it was a l-love letter," she gasped.

"Did you find it funny?" said Warr.

"I suppose a third person always does," said Midge ingenuously.

"Why did you not give it to your sister?" said Warr bitterly. "Were you afraid she would not appreciate the humour of the thing as keenly as you did?"

"You see," said Midge, to whom the tone of irony conveyed a comforting sense of his not being so very angry after all. "You see I was aware that you were quite poor—next door but one to a pauper, in fact—and that Elizabeth owed it to her family to make a splendid match. And so I didn't send the letter on."

"Did you destroy it?"

"I felt a little uncomfortable about doing that!"

"One must draw the line somewhere," said Warr, with a bitter smile. "May I ask whether the letter is in your possession still?"

In answer Midge slipped her hand into her pocket, and drew out a frayed envelope. Warr recognized his own handwriting, faded now—and the Vienna postmark. He remembered the days of doubt and unrest that led up to the writing of it, the fever of longing, the desperate resolve to tempt his fate again—the dull, slow torture of waiting for the answer that never came. He took the letter, and held it in both hands. He could not speak.

"It's rather frayed and spotty," said Midge. She tucked her handkerchief away in her pocket, and settled her bright curls, and brought her dimples into working order again. "Some of the pupils at Miss Pinnock's cried quarts over it."

Warr could not repress a shudder.

"Then you—?"

"Of course," said Midge, "I made up a little story to account for having it."

"I daresay," Warr returned, "that you would be quite equal to that."

"And as it is a really splendid love letter—"

"You flatter me," said Warr.

"As it is a really splendid love letter, and some of the pupils at Miss Pinnock's were such sentimental things," trilled Midge, "I made quite an addition to my pocket-money by letting it out on hire."

"And now you have handed it over to me for nothing," said Warr. His tone changed to sternness, no longer veiled with mockery. "Have you no shame?" he cried. "You who, with your child's hands, have wrecked two lives? Have you no remorse—no natural sense of sorrow for what you have done?"

"Of course I shall be awfully sorry if you tell," said

Midge, "because Elizabeth would be so angry—and all the good of having a Marchioness for one's sister would be gone. But you won't tell, will you, because I have behaved so well in making a candid confession, haven't I? You've got back your letter, and everything is all right. To have told the truth makes one feel so comfortable, doesn't it? One's conscience is clear, and there is no fear of a horrid fuss—unless you tell?"

"I will not tell!" said Hilary Warr.

CHAPTER XLV

MIDGE GOES BACK TO SCHOOL

"He has just driven off," said Lady Baintree, waving her hand from the window of the dining-room, as the dog-cart trundled down the avenue. "Of course we shall see him before he starts; it would be unnatural of him not to manage it somehow. Then you have anything you consider of sufficient importance to communicate—"

As it possible, thought Pope, that Diana was capable of coquetry? His brain yet reeled upon the apex of unlooked-for triumph. His heart bed with an agreeable agitation he had never experienced during his courtship of Jane. His blood flowed more warmly through his veins than it had done in the reign of Charlotte. But it was then stagnant and chill at the next words uttered by Baintree.

"Where she is. Midge, my child, far be it from me to steal your adieux, but the waggonette has been waiting for an hour, and our friend Miss Pinnock will be here if you do not arrive, as I engaged you should be at the one o'clock train."

"Oh, I am quite ready," said Midge. "Only be so good as to go, Pope and I have something to confide to

you!" Pope muttered feebly. His flaxen crest was reddened; his desperate valour had deserted him. He

sheltered himself behind Lady Baintree's skirts, and groaned in spirit, awaiting the event.

"She alludes to that unlucky proposal," flashed through the mind of Lady Baintree. But she remarked with the suave graciousness of intonation of which she was a mistress, "Indeed! What is it, dear?"

Midge turned a gentle gaze of confiding inquiry upon the crestfallen Pope.

"Of course," she said, "as Lady Baintree has been such a kind friend we ought to let her into our little secret, oughtn't we?"

"I shall be charmed," said Lady Baintree.

"Stop!" burst out Pope, before the rosebud lips could open again. "It is my—my supremely painful duty to inform Miss Colquhoun that there is no little secret to reveal."

"Oh-h!" exclaimed Midge, with an infantine accent of reproach.

"Last night," Pope went on, choking painfully, "last night, acting under pressure of a peculiar kind," he cast a drowning glance at Lady Baintree, "I made Miss Colquhoun—in short—a proposal." He gulped. "That proposal—I am now compelled by circumstances—circumstances over which I have absolute control—to withdraw. Any reparation I can offer in any shape or form I shall be happy to make! grateful to be allowed to offer." He mopped his streaming brow. "Further, I have only to say that I am ready to take the consequences of my withdrawal, whatever they may be."

"Oh! if you had only allowed me to speak," said Midge, through her close-shut little white teeth. "I could have saved you such a lot of trouble."

"Trouble!" echoed Pope.

"Because," said Midge, looking more than ever like a dainty little figure in Dresden china, as she stood with her little chin well tilted, and one neat little buckled shoe advanced beyond her frills, "because I have been thinking things over seriously since you spoke; and I have come to the conclusion that, after all, you are rather old, aren't you?"

"Old!" repeated Pope.

"And rather fat, aren't you?" the little one went on. "And I really think the best thing you could do would be to marry some elderly person—like yourself—"

"Chit!" exclaimed Lady Baintree.

"Who would coddle you, and scold your cook, and be generally a kind of nursing housekeeper!" Midge ended. The day was with her; she was about to make her retreat with flying colours, when the butler entered the room.

"A lady, my lady," said the discreet functionary, presenting a card to his mistress.

"Miss Minerva Pinnock," exclaimed Lady Baintree.

"Happening to have business in the neighbourhood," pursued the butler, "she have drove here in a hired fly from Bagley Station to fetch Miss Colquhoun back to boarding-school."

Midge had quailed and bleached under the anticipation of the Pinnockian eye, but she rallied her forces for another effort.

"Good-bye, dear Lady Baintree," she said. "I am so sorry your house-party has broken up so uncomfortably. Good-bye, Mr. Dollimore. I'm glad you see things in a sensible light, as I do. Please tell my sis-

ter—" She burst into an uncontrollable, perfectly genuine fit of crying. "Oh hoo! Oh hoo!" she wailed. "How the pupils at Miss Pinnock's will crow when they know I have been sent back!" She buried her flushed and tear-stained face in her hands, and ran out sobbing, to meet Elizabeth upon the threshold.

CHAPTER XLVI

WARR'S PILGRIMAGE

WHEN the Victoria porter shouldered Warr's effects and asked whether he had anything heavy in the van, Warr, even in the act of replying in the negative, was seized with the whimsical fancy to point to his heart, strike an attitude of tragi-comedy, and reply, "No, but I carry an intolerably weighty burden here, of which I should be glad to be relieved." Laughing and grief, according to the immortal Mock Turtle of "Alice in Wonderland," almost invariably go hand in hand.

He drove to his Jermyn Street chambers, lunched wisely, but not too well, upon a grilled chop washed down by a bottle of Sauterne, and diligently set himself, after the meal, to despatch his arrears of correspondence. As he threw the last addressed envelope into the post-basket a haunting sense of something omitted—which had occurred to him more than once during the morning—crystallised itself into the consciousness of that intended warning to Diana having been left unuttered. The German woman, whom he had recognised and spoken with, was, unless she had profited by his counsel, still at Westwood. The thought of Elizabeth still exposed to the degradation of possible contact was intolerable. He indited a note to his cousin, which in itself was a masterpiece of diplomacy, in which more was implied than expressed,

in which no names were employed, but the perusal of which would be as the blast of a trumpet in the ears of Diana, rousing her, he knew, to instant and decisive action. Then he changed his dress and went out into the baking dreariness of Piccadilly in September. He posted his letters, and transacted some business with his gunsmith, his saddlery-maker, and his tailor, and then strolled aimlessly westwards. He found himself presently in Chesterfield Gardens, staring up at the blank shuttered windows of the rooms that had echoed to the sound of a voice that he could not, if he would, have dismissed from memory, and whose carpets had felt the light pressure of a footstep that seemed printed on his heart. As he lingered, a desire sprang up in him, full-grown and imperious, to see the chambers that had been set apart for her special use; to be alone and unobserved in that very bower from which she had gone forth in all her white vestal beauty, upon her bridal morning.

"Absurd!" he said, between his closed teeth, and knocked at the door. When its chains and bolts had yielded to the hand of the guardian of the place, and she stood in her gaunt, stuff-aproned unloveliness before him, he recognised in her a superannuated servant, well known to him in boyhood, and the woman's watery glance betokened a degree of recognition which bordered on the emotionally rapturous.

"Ho! Mr. 'Ilary," she exclaimed.

"Why, Thrupp," Hilary said, kindly shaking the hand, which, with a due regard to blackleading operations in which Thrupp had evidently been engaged, she enveloped in her stuff apron, "I haven't seen your

face for years. What have you been doing with yourself all this time?"

Thrupp explained that upon entering into the "marriage state" and quitting the service of Lady Baintree, she, together with the partner of her joys, embarked upon a speculation in the coal and greengrocery line out Regent's Park way, and that the aforesaid speculation had turned out badly, the profits of the business having been regularly absorbed by Thrupp in the form of ardent spirits. But that my lady, upon the retirement of her partner underground, had been pleased to extend a helping hand, and that she herself had nothing to complain of except rheumatics, the basement being damp. And that if one thing more than another could have tended to cheer and gladden her declining years, it would have been the boon at that identical moment granted to her in the shape of a "sight of Mr. 'Ilary—beggin' your pardon, Mr. Warr!—lookin' so brown and well."

"Yes, you were always very kind to me," said Warr, stemming the tide of Mrs. Thrupp's raptures with a sovereign. "I remember that I and Mr. Pope Dollimore used to coax you, or bully you—I forget which—into leaving the key of the fruit-room in the lock, and cooking us pounds of Everton toffee in defiance of the housekeeper. And I am going to ask you to do me a favour for the sake of old times, and also for the sake of old times to keep it a secret."

As a gleam of cunning intelligence struggled to the surface of Thrupp's watery blue eyes, he paused and wished he had not been such an idiot as to make a mystery of the matter. And then the secret yearning that spurred him to the commission of what he in-

wardly stigmatised as a romantic piece of sentimentality, worthy of a boy, gained the mastery. He gave the woman another sovereign out of his slender stock, and asked her if she recalled the date at which a young lady, Miss Colquhoun, who was afterwards married from the house to a gentleman of title, stayed at Chesterfield Gardens.

"Of course," Mrs. Thrupp assented. "Miss Colquhoun! Lady Rotherholme as is."

"Lady Rotherholme," repeated Warr, with a curious sinking of the heart. "And the service I am going to ask you to do me is—" he hesitated, "to show me the—the rooms she occupied while a guest in this house."

Mrs. Thrupp was equal to the occasion. She had assisted in taking up the carpet of the very two rooms in question, she said, before the arrival of the young lady at Chesterfield Gardens. My lady had taken an uncommon fancy to her from the beginning, and both bedroom and dressing-room had been refurnished and decorated special. She invited "Mr. 'Ilary" to follow her upstairs.

Warr complied, and followed his dingy guide from floor to floor of the muffled, druggeted, holland-swathed mansion. They arrived upon the landing of the third floor at last, and his conductress opened a door, and Warr found himself standing in the haven of his poor aspirations.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE LOST BOWER

RUPP had had the tact to withdraw; her carpet slippers could be heard in thudding retreat stairs. Warr stood and looked about him with a gasp, tight aching at the chest. By some omission the pretty room had not been dismantled or shrouded in figuring folds of whitey-brown. The dainty chairs and tables of some pretty green-stained wood, covered in a creamy-hued cretonne sprinkled with daisies, were right side up, and the curtains of the little French bedstead were not pinned up in e-rolls, and retained their pristine grace of youth. Warr kissed the hem of one of them as tenderly as if it had been Elizabeth's shroud.

He went to the dressing-table, then looked with a smile at the reflection of his own haggard face in the crystal sheet that had so often given back to the eth Colquhoun the image of her nymph-like form. Pan had captured the nymph after all. Love had been beaten in the race with the goat-legged one. He might have won, thought Warr, but for the treacherous trick of a selfish child. He touched his breast-pocket, where the shabby letter lay, transferred from the pocket of his morning coat, and the rustling of paper was as the crackling of thorns. Yet one little slip of comfort was his. If the letter had reached Elizabeth, she would have turned for the sake of the

writer, and given him herself indeed. She had not been all heartless in those old sad days. She was not heartless now. She—she had begged him to go away. Was not that a confession of distrust in her own strength, half a confession that the sight of him raised memories too poignant to be borne? The conviction was perilously sweet, but he would not dwell upon it. "Oh, God forbid, my beloved, that word or thought of mine should ever wrong you!" he said, and put the cup of memory from him with both hands.

He looked round the room again before he went, carefully, as though to stamp every detail upon recollection, and went to the door. There he hesitated and returned. Timidly and awkwardly he bent upon his knees beside the little bed and made a clumsy prayer for her, and touched the pillow where the beloved head had rested, with reverent lips, and went away, closing the door behind him as if the chamber had been one of death. Then he passed downstairs and bade Mrs. Thrupp—who appeared from the lower regions at the echo of his footsteps—good-bye, and issued into the street with that sense of doing something done before waking or in dreams, which sometimes attaches to the perpetration of an unusual action. Then a smart private car chuffing by was stopped close to the kerb, a familiar voice hailed him—Granger Dorwen, the chum of his Eton days—hero of the sanguinary encounter with Pope in the stable-yard at Warr Court, dragged him into the machine, overwhelmed him with good-fellowship, finally insisted on his coming back to dinner.

"Your old rooms in the Albany?" Warr said, ac-

cepting with a certain relief, the alternative offered to a solitary meal at his chambers or club.

"Ah!—not exactly," Dorwen answered with a certain hesitation. He gave the order "Home," and said with a nod, "The Far West," before plunging into a series of eager interrogations respecting Warr's Persian experiences. He was, it will be remembered, the rival candidate for the Consulship, the "more promising man," to quote Warr himself, "the abler kind of fellow, and more suited to the post from the official point of view," whose unlucky attack of typhoid had led to Hilary's appointment.

Dorwen was much altered. "Not for the better," it occurred to Hilary. His complexion was stale, like his conversation; his figure had become puffy; his accent had coarsened, as Hilary presently found, with his taste in female beauty, for the smart automobile deposited them at a lawn and garden environed Putney villa, presided over by a hostess of a decidedly full-blown type. They dined with the assistance of another man of Dorwen's set; a polite, well-groomed nonentity, who hailed from the Foreign Office. The dinner was excellent, the wine and tobacco irreproachable. The bouncing hostess, with a ripe Partaga between her pouting lips, retained her chair of presidency over the revels. She thought Warr an interesting man to look at; but openly voted him slow company.

They had coffee in the card-room, where the green, gold-lined baccarat cloth was temptingly spread. One or two other men dropped in. Warr joined in the game, gravely and without interest, and won. The lady of the villa quoted the old proverb about luck

at cards as his vein of success became more evident. He laughed at the stale witticism so harshly that his own voice was strange in his ears. He heard the letter rustle in his breast as he bent to pick up a card that had fallen from his hand in dealing, and was sensible of an odd pang of shame and regret at having brought it—the written outpouring of love for *her*—into such company. There was a piano in the room. The fair hostess—who boasted a connection, not over remote, with the lyric stage—went to it and sang, first a music-hall ballad of the common type, then the dead Goring Thomas's "Night in June." The voice was coarse, but well-trained, the vulgar songstress was lost sight of as the first notes of the melody came to Warr's ear, vibrating with passion, thrilling with regretful yearning, the swan-song of a broken heart. He had heard Elizabeth sing the song at Cannes, before his sun went down, and the cliff-spring ceased to gush, and the narcissi were nipped by frost—back in the dead days. The room whirled round with him—the vacuous faces of his companions, the henna-stained waves and plump pink shoulders of the singing hostess inspired him with sickly loathing. He made his excuses, and escaped from the house.

It was late, the night was very still, only broken by the shriek of the last train, the passing of a belated taxicab. The darkness and the loneliness of the streets were grateful to his dazzled eyes and aching head. He held his hat in his hand, as he covered with his long light stride the miles that lay between Putney and his chambers in Jermyn Street. The brisk exercise had revived and calmed him; he slept almost as soon as his head touched the pillow. It was some hours

later that he awakened with a beating heart, and in his ears the piteous echo of a voice that cried to him—it seemed from miles away—for help. The voice was Elizabeth's. He dismissed the impression, and slept again, only to waken with a cry of still more piercing appeal ringing in his ears. For the third time it awakened him, and then sleep came no more.

"You don't look over well, sir," the servant said, spreading his bath-felt, and clanking his hot-water cans with matutinal officiousness.

"I did not sleep much," said Warr. "Bates, leave those things alone. I want you to go over to the Club."

"The 'Younger Sons,' sir?"

"No, 'The Travellers.' Bring any letters that may have been delivered there. Here is my card with a line I have written on it. Be as quick as you can."

The man obeyed, and returned with two letters. One was a tradesman's envelope. The other . . . Warr's heart throbbed once, heavily, and seemed to stop as he recognised the delicate handwriting, the coroneted device. He opened it with shaking hands. Within was a sheet of paper roughly scrawled with one word and an initial.

"Help! E."

CHAPTER XLVIII

A REVELATION

THE stars were paling at the touch of dawn when Elizabeth went to her room upon the night of the servants' ball at Westwood. Her maid, flushed and dishevelled from the last country-dance, was late in attendance. Her mistress dismissed her to bed as soon as she appeared, without the expected reprimand. Elizabeth was conscious of a faint sense of amusement in the discovery as she proceeded, unaided, to disrobe, of the pitch of fine ladylike helplessness to which she had attained. Her slippers, dainty articles of wadded satin trimmed with sable fur, only yielded themselves up after protracted search; her dressing-gown was found in a place where she had looked ten minutes previously. As she loosened the masses of dead-leaf hair, and the hair-pins tinkled one by one into the silver-gilt tray upon the toilet-table, she watched the reflection of her face in the mirror with brooding anxiety. There was a change in it since the morning, since that night's half hour of talk upon the balcony. The woman in the glass, with her delicately flushed cheeks and shining eyes, looked less like Lady Rotherholme, more like Elizabeth Colquhoun.

"Why do you look like that?" she said disdainfully, to the woman in the glass. "You have no right—no reason."

The old Elizabeth, the Elizabeth of the days at

Cannes, had been stronger. The arm that wielded the tortoiseshell brush was thinner than it used to be, and wearied sooner. Elizabeth laid down the brush before very long with a deep-drawn breath and a look of fatigue. As she did so, a glimmer of white upon the pincushion attracted her glance. She put forth her hand, and took the thing—an envelope of glazy cream-laid paper, addressed to her in an odd, zigzag foreign handwriting by her maiden name. She frowned and smiled over the superscription, yet there was nothing strange in it, or ominous to her. Certain remote friends, unaware of her marriage, had written to her from time to time. To all of these she had replied, acquainting them with the change in her worldly affairs, and one or two remained perhaps who had yet to be enlightened. She opened the letter, and as her steady eyes travelled down its pages, a curious change came over the woman who sat reading in the chair and the woman who was reflected in the glass, for both women turned to stone by degrees. Over both crept the same dull grey tint, until brow, and cheeks, and neck, and bosom wore that ashen granite hue. Sparkling points gleamed upon the surface, drops of moisture, wrung forth by torture—they might have been the specks of crystal scattered through the rock. Elizabeth grew older, moment by moment; the lustre of her very hair faded. The expression of her downcast eyes was a thing to conjecture about, until, the letter twice read through from beginning to end, she lifted them—and then! was it joy?

She rose to her full height—she had never seemed so tall—and still holding the letter in her hand, went to the doors, one after another, and locked and bolted

them. Then she moved back to the glass, and unfastened the seven rows of pearls—the famous Norchester pearls—from about her throat, and laid them in the velvet case that occupied a special niche in her jewel-casket. The plain gold band beneath the emerald keeper she wore upon the third finger of her left hand she did not remove, upon second thoughts.

“Till the last doubt is cleared, the last proof given,” she said, “it shall remain!” But in her heart she knew that the story the letter told was true. She moved about the room then for an hour and more, lightly and regularly coming and going between her open dress-baskets and the open wardrobe, until she had collected a little pile of things, none of them quite new. All of them had belonged to her before her marriage. There was a white serge dress she had always kept by her, without acknowledging, even to herself, that her reason for so doing was that she had worn the gown at Cannes upon the first occasion of her meeting with Hilary Warr. There was a small desk containing letters and a few trinkets that had belonged to her dead mother—there were other things the aggregated bulk of which would have barely filled a small portmanteau. If the story told in the letter was true, these few poor fardels, with a tiny sum of money, some thirty pounds in all, represented the whole of the worldly possessions of Elizabeth Colquhoun.

Then, her task being for the time ended, she sat down in the chair before the looking-glass, and leaned her head upon her hand. She closed her eyes, not to sleep, but to look into the past. And these are some of the things she saw as one by one memory gave the

pictures up to view, and Conscience wrote their titles under them in letters of scorching flame.

She saw first, a pretty, frivolous young mother, holding a six months' baby on her knee, while an elder child leaned beside her. The baby was soon tired of, and then came the expected treat, a grand review of old dresses, out of the best of which a pretty new frock was to be tossed up for Elizabeth.

"If we were rich," her mother said, with a little petulant movement of her shoulders—inherited by Midge—"there would be none of this patching and contriving. We must put up with it because we are poor. But I hope when you grow up, my pet, you will be wiser than Mummy!"

The child Elizabeth looked up with clear eyes.

"How could I be wiser than Mummy?"

Then the pretty mother—so pretty and so gay, as Elizabeth remembered her—stooped and kissed her laughingly, and said, "You must never, never marry a poor man. That was the mistake poor Mummy made when she was a girl—quite a young girl—and she has been sorry—oh, so sorry, ever since. Remember!"

The child promised to remember, and the picture faded, and another took its place.

This was a picture of barefooted children—girls—among them the child Elizabeth, playing on the sands at Ostend. They were marking out a garden with bunches of artificial flowers and tiny flags bought for a centime each. When they got tired they sat in a circle, a gathered bouquet of bright eyes and rosy cheeks framed in cotton sun-bonnets and shadowed by flapping straw hats. They talked of the wonderful

things they would have if a wish, a single wish, were granted by some good fairy to each of them.

One said, "I should have a doll's house as big—oh! as big as the Kursaal, with live dolls in it, that could talk and walk and sing without being wound up."

Another said: "I should ask for a steam-yacht all of my own, to sail round the world in. And only nice, kind, pretty people should be my guests; all the nasty ones shall be left behind with Mademoiselle Ploux."

Mademoiselle, sitting a little way off, busy with her French novel and her eternal tatting, raised her tired eyes, and shook her round head, crowned with its fatigued straw hat, trimmed with black velvet, at the sound of her name.

Another child boasted: "I would choose horses to ride and drive, not ugly ones like these"—she pointed to a dismal string of over-worked ponies staggering under the sturdy weight of Belgian pleasure-seekers of both sexes—"but shiny-coated white ones—or black—with long manes and tails and rose-coloured bridles studded with gold like those we saw at the Cirque Royale."

"I would wish beautiful dresses of silk and lace—whole wardrobes full," another said, "and shining stones—rubies and emeralds—to wear on my head and round my neck. And I shall sit in a box at the Opera, and people will look at me through their lorgnettes instead of at the singers on the stage, and whisper to each other how beautiful I am."

Then Elizabeth—little Elizabeth—said boldly, "I should have for my own all the things that all of you

have told about, the fine house and the yacht, the beautiful horses to ride, the lovely dresses to wear and the shining jewels."

A grave child who had not yet spoken said, "That could not be. The fairy was only to grant one wish!"

"Oh yes!" said little Elizabeth, "but my wish would be that a grand, rich gentleman might marry me. He would be able to give me everything—everything—and I should be so happy!"

The picture faded. Another shone out in its place. Elizabeth knew again the landscape shown her—the cliff walk at Cannes, the spice-breathing pines, the violet sea crimsoning to the sunset, the moss-grown seat beside the trickling spring, the narcissi and maidenhair fern growing in the moist shelter of rock-ledges. She knew the two people who sat there. She saw again the flush of joyful triumph on Warr's face die out in the paleness of consternation. She heard her own voice delivering the fiat of divorce between their wedded souls. She could not look for long; the rush of tears came quickly, and blotted everything out in a quivering mist. Then she saw the altar of St. George's, Hanover Square, decked with flowers and palms for a festival—her wedding. The smell of lilies was in her nostrils—the rustling of the bishop's lawn-sleeves, the stifled whispers of the gaily dressed congregation, the chanted responses of the choir, sounded in her ears. She caught the gleam of the wedding-ring as it slipped over her finger—felt for the first time—thought for the first time—knew for the first time what she had done, as she stepped into the softly cushioned carriage beside the flesh of her flesh, the bone of her bone. Other pictures would have followed,

but she cried aloud and broke the spell, and opened dazed eyes and saw the bleached white spectre of Elizabeth Colquhoun sitting in the cold grey light of morning, before the looking-glass.

She rose to her feet then, and moved uncertainly to her bed, and threw herself upon it and slept a strange, stunned sleep. One dream only came to her. She dreamed that she rose from her bed and crossed the room, stepping over the bars of yellow light that filtered between the slats of the Venetian blinds upon the carpet as though each had been a veritable obstacle, and went to the writing-table. She took paper and a pen, she thought, and wrote a single word, signed with the initial of her Christian name, and enclosed it in an envelope addressed to Hilary Warr at the Travellers' Club. She thought she stamped the letter, and went back to throw herself upon her bed and sleep again. After this she dreamed no more, and the knocking of her maid at the door alone roused her from the heavy stupor of unconsciousness.

"You have not been to bed, my lady!" the woman cried in consternation.

"I fell asleep in the chair," Elizabeth said calmly. Then she drank the tea the woman had brought, and bathed, and had herself dressed in the old white serge gown. It was out of fashion and creased by long keeping, and the maid wondered at her mistress's curious fancy, but she was a discreet servitress, and obeyed without question.

"Find me a bag," Elizabeth said, pointing to the heterogeneous heap of articles upon the carpet, "and pack those things in it. I may want them later. And," she hesitated before putting the question which rose

to her lips. "Has—did anyone leave the house early this morning?"

The woman gave the affirmative in surprise. One of the maids, a German person in the service of Lady Caroline Wragge, had left before any of the domestics of the house had risen. Nobody had seen her except the groom, who had driven her to the station in the market-cart, persuaded that she was bound upon an errand for her mistress. No reason could be given for her sudden departure, unless it might be that the quarters assigned to the servants of Lady Baintree's guests were not over-commodious in point of space, and the German person had objected on principle to sleeping in an attic.

"That will do," Elizabeth said. She looked about the room vaguely, putting her hand to her head. A sudden dizziness and vertigo had seized her.

"I put your letter in the early post-bag, my lady," the maid said, hazarding a guess as to what her mistress might be seeking.

"My letter?" Elizabeth repeated vaguely.

"It lay upon the writing-table, my lady, when I came up with your tea, ready addressed and stamped," the maid explained. "I thought, my lady, it was put there for me to post, and so I ran downstairs and slipped it into the bag. I hope I have not done wrong!"

A great wave of colour swept over Elizabeth's face, dyeing her throat to the edge of her gown, and fading away almost instantaneously.

"You have not done wrong. I am in the habit of leaving letters, as you have said. Can you remember," she looked away, "to whom this letter you spoke of was addressed?"

The maid blushed.

"Oddly enough, my lady, I did look at the address. And it struck me particular, the name being the name belonging to one of the gentlemen staying in the house."

"Yes?"

"Hilary Warr, Esq., Travellers' Club, London, W."

"Thank you," said Elizabeth dully. "That is all I wished to hear. Where is—where is Lord Rotherholme?"

"Fenton is now dressing him, my lady. He—"

"You shall take a message," said Elizabeth. "Or—stay—I will go to his dressing-room myself!"

Rotherholme was being shaved. He pushed the valet aside when he saw Elizabeth standing in the doorway, and broke out into curses and reproaches as the man left the room.

"I have not come here, as you say, to make a scene," Elizabeth said with an icy ring in her voice that he knew and disliked. "I merely desire to explain my reasons for acting as I have done, by showing you this letter. I see by your face that you are familiar with the handwriting."

Rotherholme turned several colours, primary hues prevailing. A sickly green remained when the others had faded. He dipped a little way into the letter, and came out swearing.

"Do not use bad language," Elizabeth said wearily, "at least, while I remain here. Though, if the story that letter tells is true"—a faint smile quivered about her pale lips—"I suppose you will not consider yourself bound to pay me any overpowering amount of respect!"

"You're looking like a ghost in that condemned white gown," said Rotherholme, looking obliquely past Elizabeth.

Some of her pent-up passion brimmed over.

"I command you to tell me, Richard," she said in tones that were new and strange to him, "whether there is any shadow of truth in what this woman says?" She looked at him with stern, compelling eyes, that wrung the truth from him in spite of all his feeble will.

"She pretended to be dead, damn her!" he said, "and I'm sure I wish she was. Yes—she's my wife, if you will have it! Stop! where are you going?"

Elizabeth had passed out of the room.

CHAPTER XLIX

THE HOUSE-PARTY BREAKS UP

ELIZABETH now caught her sister by the hand and drew the sobbing girl back across the threshold of the dining-room.

"What is it?" she said, looking from the perturbed countenance of Lady Baintree to the sheepish face of Pope.

"I—I meant—I intended to explain to you—" Lady Baintree began. "I anticipated when you knew my—my reasons you would understand—"

At this juncture a servant presented himself as the bearer of a request that Miss Colquhoun would not keep Miss Pinnock waiting longer than was absolutely necessary, as a four-mile drive lay between Westwood and the station, and the Brighton trains were few and far between.

"I quite understand," Elizabeth said, comprehending the state of affairs. "You are sending Midge back to school—in disgrace, it appears—for some reason." She held her head erect and drew the whimpering girl closer to her side.

"You hurt my hand!" Midge complained peevishly.

"I am sorry," said Elizabeth. "Come, say good-bye to Lady Baintree, and thank her for her hospitality as I do. We are going away together, dear—" her steady voice faltered for a moment—"back to the old school—"

"My dear Elizabeth!" entreated Lady Baintree.

"Dear Lady Rotherholme," Pope began.

"Please don't call me by that name any more!" said Elizabeth.

"Great Heavens!" uttered Lady Baintree.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Pope.

"Oh! whatever do you mean?" cried Midge.

"I mean," Elizabeth said coldly, "that I have no claim to that name—now."

"Oh, how can you talk so?" said Midge, pulling her hand away, "when your husband—"

"Don't call him my husband any more!" said the elder sister, a spasm of pain contracting her white lips. "We are nothing to each other—from to-day. . . . My old name is mine again—from to-day. . . . Diana," she turned to Lady Baintree, "it is best you should hear from me the truth I only learned last night. I speak it out in the presence of Mr. Dollimore—the whole world will know it in a few hours! When Richard—when Lord Rotherholme married me he was—though he did not know it—I do him the justice to believe that!—not free to contract a legal alliance. She—the real Lady Rotherholme—was beneath this roof when I crossed your threshold last night. She made herself known to me—it does not matter how—and the story she told me has since been acknowledged to be true by—by my—by Lord Rotherholme. And for this reason Midge and I—" she stretched her hand out entreatingly to the sullen girl, "are going away together."

"Oh! how awful?" cried Midge, shivering.

"Don't be afraid, dear!" said Elizabeth caressingly.

"This seems terrible enough to you now, but after-

wards—after a little—things will seem—” her voice faltered and broke—“almost as they used to be—as though they never had been changed. I will work and earn enough for both of us; we need not be a burden on papa. I am sure Miss Pinnock will get me an engagement as governess and—”

“Oh, how can you talk about being a governess?” exclaimed Midge with a shrill little scream. “Don’t you know a governess must be either married or single—and you’re both!”

“It is true,” assented Elizabeth with a heartbreaking laugh, “I am both!”

“The pupils at Miss Pinnock’s,” the little one went on, in a tone of aggrieved propriety, “the pupils at Miss Pinnock’s would call you an improper person.”

“Would they?” said Elizabeth hoarsely. She covered her eyes with both hands for a moment, and drew the hands away, and wrung them in one another against her breast in the desperate effort to maintain her self-control under this last thrust. That the hand that dealt it should be dear made the thrust more poignant still. “They would call me an improper person,” she whispered to herself. “I suppose they would be right—I suppose they would be right!”

“Of course!” said Midge acutely, “and I think if you had any real sense of the duty of a sister—an elder sister—you would have acted differently. Things can always be hushed up,” she cried petulantly, “and why can’t they now? And I have been cruelly treated—led to expect that my prospects would be so tremendously improved by your marrying a rich man, and becoming a person of consequence, and now it appears that you are a person of no consequence at all—a mere

nobody!" For the second time she burst into a flood of wrathful tears. "And I never—never want to speak to you again as long as I live!" She ran out of the room.

There was a silence, broken by the grinding of tyreless wheels upon the gravel, as the rickety fly from the station conveyed its freight away.

"Elizabeth—my poor, poor child!" said Lady Baintree, with a rush of compunction. She took both the cold hands into hers, and looked into the sunken eyes from which light and colour seemed to have faded. "You are not going—you must not leave us! Let me implore you to do nothing hastily—let me beg you not to—"

"I cannot stay," Elizabeth said vaguely; "it was so kind of you to ask us down, and we have had such a pleasant—"

Lady Baintree interrupted with a little moan. "Oh, do be real with me, Elizabeth!" she pleaded.

"I have had so little practice," said Elizabeth with a piteous quaver in her tone. "And nothing seems real since last night."

"I don't know whether I am on my head or my heels," said Lady Baintree despairingly. "But anything in the world that I could do—"

"To atone—" put in Pope meaningly.

"To atone for the—the awful muddle I've managed to get you into," said Diana, "I would do gladly. It can do no good now, but I beg—I implore you to accept a humble apology, an earnest entreaty for forgiveness, from a warm-hearted but headstrong woman—" she wiped an irrepressible tear away—"whose chief

occupation in life has hitherto been to play battledore and shuttlecock with other people's lives."

"Diana!" Elizabeth began.

"Make no excuses for me, I beg," said Lady Baintree impetuously. "Only try to think kindly of me—not to give me up altogether as a meddling, muddling idiot. Don't leave me! Pope, help me to persuade her not to leave us!"

"I certainly will, my dear Diana," said Pope. "Lady—ahem! my dear young lady, let me entreat you in Diana's name and my own to make this house—soon to be our house,—your home. Let us stand by you—"

"Against the whole world," broke in Lady Baintree, "and prove you to be what you are, an innocent, injured woman. As for Society," she said, banishing a momentary vision of blank looks and glassy stares, "if Society dares to turn up its nose at you, I'll pull it, or my name is not Diana Baintree!"

"Well spoken!" said Pope approvingly. The hand he took was deadly cold. It closed convulsively upon his own, and Elizabeth winced and shuddered as a footstep she knew well sounded in the hall and halted at the dining-room.

"Good-mornin', everybody," said Lord Rotherholme, entering.

CHAPTER L

ROTHERHOLME RIDES AWAY

HE wore a motoring coat of generous proportions, and carried a cap with eye-shields, in his little gloved hands. He looked more sickly than ever, and his manner balanced as usual between the extremes of self-confidence and diffidence. Lady Baintree, with a wild effort to be easy, natural, and every-day, asked whether he had breakfasted.

"I don't breakfast, thanky," said Lord Rotherholme; "but I've had a green plum and a glass of gin."

Elizabeth moved automatically to leave the room; he reached the door before her, and laid his hand upon hers as it touched the handle. She bleached and recoiled at his touch, and he saw it.

"I ain't poison, Lizzy," he said shortly and huffily. "Look here! This bloom—this business has got to be talked over quietly. What I ask you is to stop and hear what I've got to say. That's only fair, ain't it?" He appealed to Lady Baintree.

"I think such a request is only right and necessary," responded Diana. She met the mute entreaty of Elizabeth's dilating eyes with a reassuring nod. "I will be present, certainly," she said, "if you think you would prefer it, dear."

"I should infinitely prefer it," said Elizabeth in an extinguished voice.

Pope vanished at a glance from Lady Baintree.

She took up a position at the head of the breakfast-table. Lord Rotherholme, whistling a dismal tune between his teeth, disposed himself upon a chair at the other end. Elizabeth stood tall and straight and white upon the hearthrug, and said no word.

"Hadn't somebody better begin?" Lady Baintree hinted nervously.

"I'm on the scratch," said Rotherholme, "and waitin' for the start." He coughed gruffly, and cleared his throat with laborious care before he began. "Old Jelf's been down—" and stopped short.

"Old Jelf?" interrogated Lady Baintree.

"She knows him," said Rotherholme, indicating Elizabeth with a jerk of the elbow. "Jelf's my solicitor, and a good 'un too." He put his hand to his head. "Excuse me!" he observed. "What was it I was sayin', before I went off the track?"

"You were expatiating upon the gentleman's business qualities," said Diana. "I am afraid you are not well."

"I'm a bit piano this mornin'," Rotherholme avowed. "Excuse me!" He addressed himself to Elizabeth. "Perhaps you'll be glad to hear that Jelf's had a talk with Lena."

"Lena?" echoed Lady Baintree.

"I allude," explained Rotherholme, "to the present Marchioness of—"

"Oh! I quite understand!" said Lady Baintree hastily. "Pray proceed!"

"I dropped in—under the present painful circumstances," said Rotherholme, "to give Lizzy there Jelf's finals as regards the situation. Says Jelf— What *did* Jelf say now?"

He looked so small, and mean and despicable, as he sat blinking uneasily in the bright sunshine, and trying to remember what Jelf had said, that Lady Baintree stirred uneasily in her chair, impelled with a sudden, well-nigh irresistible desire to shake him.

"Oh!" she sighed.

"Excuse me!" said Rotherholme, looking up and down at the ceiling and the carpet and all round the room, yet never directly glancing at Elizabeth. "Jelf says—'Keep your hair on!'"

"What?" exclaimed Lady Baintree.

"Keep your hair on—this is a blind rush!" repeated Lord Rotherholme laboriously. "'Let her be,' says Jelf, 'now she's given way to her temper and made the mistake of writin' to your wife—I mean to Lizzy there. And as soon as she gets her head down and begins to nibble the grass a bit—that's the signal for us! Her past career must be gone through with a candle,' says Jelf, 'and that bein' done, I'll lay you ten to one that gettin' a divorce from her will only be a matter of weeks.'"

"Weeks!" exclaimed Lady Baintree, with a gasp of relief. She looked eagerly towards Elizabeth, but Elizabeth made no sign. Rotherholme rose awkwardly. He thrust one hand into the breast of his waistcoat, and leant the knuckles of the other upon the table-cloth after the fashion of a man—an awkward and embarrassed man, who had been called upon to respond to an after-dinner toast. For the first time his small pale eyes looked straight at Elizabeth; he moistened his dry lips with his tongue.

"Lizzy—I suppose you're aware that I'm a gentleman?"

"You have often told me so," said Elizabeth, wearily.

"I'm a gentleman," repeated Rotherholme, "and as such am wishful to act on the square. Oblige me by understandin'—without prejudice and before witnesses," he indicated Lady Baintree, "that—Lena being once got rid of—there will be no objections raised, on my side, to you and me entering for the Weddin' Plate again."

He collapsed limply in his chair, staring glassily at the carpet. Lady Baintree sprang to her feet with a cry of joy.

"Richard!" she cried. "Oh! I knew everything would come right in the end. A matter of weeks—hushed up—the whole affair—and a quiet private wedding. How clever of you! How noble! Dear Richard!" She fell upon the neck of the little man and kissed him. She embraced Elizabeth, and rustled in triumph to the door. "No fuss—no scandal!" she said, "and all minor difficulties can be so beautifully obviated. Elizabeth here with me—yourself resident in town—until— Oh! I must go and gladden Pope with the glorious news!"

"Hang it! I supposed she knew I was a gentleman?" said Rotherholme dismally, as the door closed behind Lady Baintree's retreating draperies. He tapped his front teeth with the leather peak of his cap. "You don't seem to have anything to say upon the subject, do you?" He addressed himself to Elizabeth.

"Upon the subject of our re-marriage?"

"Yes!" said Rotherholme, nodding.

"I have something to say. I think that in pro-

posing it you have done the most generous action that you ever did, or will do in the whole of your life."

"I knew you'd jump at the notion!" said Rotherholme blankly.

"Jump?" echoed Elizabeth, with a faint inflection of surprise. "Oh, *no!*"

He looked at her, she looked back at him, standing tall and straight in her severe white draperies.

"No?"

"I—I hope you will not think me unkind," said Elizabeth faintly; "but—but—I had rather not!"

"Eh?"

"I had—rather not."

"Lizzy," said Rotherholme, "you've gone dotty—I mean you're out of your senses!"

"I have no doubt you think so," said Elizabeth; "I do not expect that the world will think otherwise; but—"

"But—?"

"It is no use speaking of disparity. You could—I could never make you understand how wretched I have been."

"As to that," said Rotherholme sulkily, "I haven't had such a wonderful rosy time of it."

"Possibly you have suffered too?" said Elizabeth.

"I picked you out of the mud, yes, out of the mud," said Rotherholme with a maudlin sob. "And you've given yourself the airs of blood royal—you have—and I've put with it, I have, by Jingo!"

"I am conscious," Elizabeth said, in the same calm, measured tone, "that you have had something to overlook as well as I."

CHAPTER LI

DIVIDED WAYS

"IT'S only fair that you should own it," Rotherholme went on. "I've had my troubles as well as you, and my disappointments—though I haven't grouched about 'em. What price me tellin' you sportin' anecdotes, and you yawnin' till the top of my head felt loose." He wiped his little eyes with an outrageously-patterned silk bandana handkerchief. "What price you enlivening me and my company with high-toned Society gossip, till I felt as lonely as—as a lost sixpence on Noomarket Heath? Where was your sorrow when I'd come to smash over a sportin' speculation that seemed a dead cert, and likewise your joy when I'd got Home sweet Home on the winner?"

"I have acknowledged that there have been faults on both sides." Elizabeth came towards him with outstretched hands. "I have tried to be plain and candid with you—I have not taken the tragic tone, or striven to represent myself as a martyr. Our marriage has been a mistake. Let us both acknowledge this and part as friends. In the future," she flushed, and her eyes fell, though she held her head erectly, "some day yet to come, when you are—happily married to somebody who—shares your tastes—you may thank me for having done what I do now."

"I *have* sometimes thought," owned Rotherholme, sitting up and rubbing his meagre chin, "that I made

a fair old mistake in not takin' Polly—" Elizabeth's eyebrows wore the faintest possible arch of interrogation, and he hastened to explain. "Polly—she's a daughter of my trainer's—Bob Tilling—stout man you've seen at our—the place at Doncaster. Alarmin' fine girl—and one of the best, take her all in all!—though my people would have jibbed at my making the match. Still, when a man pleases himself—!" He got upon his legs and thrust his hands deep in the pockets of his big coat. He cleared his throat and blinked a little, and seemed, as he ducked his head and grinned sheepishly, more like one of his own grooms than ever. "You—you've made up your mind, then, to refuse my offer?" he said.

"Yes," Elizabeth answered low and clearly.

"I can't make you take me, can I?" asked Rotherholme.

"I believe not!" Elizabeth answered.

"You're quite prepared," suggested Rotherholme, "to find your position an infernally unpleasant one; for, of course, you know how people—high and low—will talk. I'm sharp enough and experienced enough to know what they'll say about a woman who—"

"Let them say what they like," Elizabeth returned. "I am quite prepared to listen to comments, quite ready to bear whatever punishment may be in store for me. If the whole world of men and women were to hoot at me," her voice gained energy and power as she spoke, and her grey eyes burned anew with the fire that had seemed so lately quenched in them, "they would not turn me from my purpose. My own contempt—my own scorn of myself, is what I cannot endure." Her tone changed. "I beg your pardon,"

she said, "I know how you dislike lofty language and vehement expressions. Let us both say simply that we are sorry for what has been, and that we wish each other well for the future in which we are to live apart."

"There's one thing we haven't mentioned," said Rotherholme, taking his hands out of his pockets. "I mean the question of cash. Of course, our side would be willing to do the handsome—"

"Pray—pray," said Elizabeth, with an uncontrollable shudder, "don't speak of that! I could not—could not accept. Oh! you could never comprehend how utterly degrading such a—" She broke off.

"Well, I can't make you take it, can I?" said Rotherholme. He shook hands with her loosely and limply, and picked up his cap from the table-cloth and went on: "As it's a case of 'off' on both sides, there's nothin' to prevent me taking the next train to town." He dropped his cap upon his head. "We part without malice, I hope?" he said, and swung round upon his heel.

"Oh, quite!" returned Elizabeth.

"Then—by-bye!" said Rotherholme, lifting the cap a little way and dropping it back again. "Always take a friendly interest, you know!" He moved to the door, with his groom's walk and his groom's manner in stronger evidence than before. "Let's hear how you get on!" he said, and nodded and went out.

"Oh!" said Elizabeth, with a long quavering sigh of relief. Then she uttered an exclamation of dismay, and hurried to the door. "Richard!" she called, and her voice sounded strange in her own ears. "Richard!"

Rotherholme's returning steps were heard; he presented to her a face in which different emotions—not all of them joyful ones—struggled for supremacy. "You—you don't mean to say," he began, "you haven't—eh?"

"I have not changed my mind," said Elizabeth with a faint smile. "I merely wished to ask you to take charge of these." She held out to him a velvet case.

"These?" echoed Rotherholme confusedly.

"They are the Norchester pearls," Elizabeth explained. She touched the spring of the case, and the famous jewels were revealed, seven rows of moony, gleaming wonders, coiled in their purple bed, the priceless brilliant that formed the clasp blazing like a comet entangled by accident in the mazes of the Milky Way. Rotherholme took the case awkwardly and closed it. He dropped it into his pocket and thanked her still more awkwardly, and went away out of the room and through the hall door.

His car was waiting there. She heard him speak to the chauffeur in his common voice. "Get over, you! I'm going to take the wheel." And then she heard the slight bustle as the man gave place to the master, and the crackle of dry gravel under the tyres of the great grey car, as it moved forwards, and leaping at once into its racing speed, whizzed down the wide avenue and out through the open lodge-gates, bearing the late master of her fate out of her life for evermore.

CHAPTER LII

LADY BAINTREE RETIRES FROM BUSINESS

"SHE refused Rotherholme's offer absolutely," said Lady Baintree. "She wrecked her prospects with her own hands when she did so. She committed social suicide when she let him leave the house. '*You will repent this,*' I said. '*You are strung up, being a high-spirited young creature, to the notion of being a martyr. You are ready to be stoned, but you are not prepared to be picked up and pitied. Wait, only wait,*' I said, '*until you have been called a poor dear by a woman you despise!*' I confess it, I lost my patience, but all the same I was prepared to stand by Elizabeth through thick and thin. And stubbornly and ungratefully she rejects my aid. Within one hour of Rotherholme's departure she left the house. We don't know where she is; we can only conjecture that she has gone to her father, whose address we have not got. And at this deplorable juncture you make your appearance. Hilary, I am a miserable woman!" Diana dried her eyes, which were beginning to overflow. "I have sustained shocks of so severe a nature within the last forty-eight hours," she said, "that I am reduced to a mere bundle of throbbing nerves, a miserable wisp of humanity. Oh, Pope! I have given you my word. Never again will I make a match of any description. My very cousins shall remain bachelors and spinsters to the end of their lives."

"A very sensible resolution, Diana," said Pope Dollimore.

Lady Baintree Retires from Business 309

"And so I abandon the dearest wish of my heart," said Lady Baintree, "which has always been to see you settled, Hilary. Talking of that, the eldest of the Crumpleigh girls (you know the great biscuit firm, Crumpleigh, Cracknell & Co.) has just come out. She will be presented next season, and, I hear, is pretty."

"Diana!" coughed Pope warningly.

"But never again, as I have vowed, will I yield to the temptation of adjusting the matrimonial prospects of any single human being," declared Lady Baintree emphatically. "Pope, it will be your solemn duty, if ever you see me about to yield to temptation, to check the ruling passion, nip the impulse in the bud."

"I will, Diana," said Pope.

"Make some sign; whisper some word. If you were to say 'Eggs,' for instance, I should remember how many basketfuls of other people's I have helped to break," said Diana Baintree.

Her remorse was quite genuine. How long her mood of abandonment and renunciation would last, for how many months, weeks or days her bean-fed hobby would remain idle in its stall, was matter for conjecture. Warr's heart was heavy for Elizabeth as he went away. She had repented as soon as that cry for help had been uttered; she had gone away into the outer darkness where the disappointed and the unsuccessful and the disgraced hide their heads, and left not the frailest clue by which he might trace her.

A few days passed, and then, who knows how, mysterious hints as to a marred marriage, an unfortunate recrudescence of a grave scandal connected with the college career of a well-known nobleman of sporting reputation, crept into the Society journals. Letters

signed "Tittums," or "Bluebell," purporting to be written from the fashionable country houses where the exclusive world were spending their autumn holidays, to confidential correspondents residing in the comparatively deserted parish of St. James's, London, recounted different versions of the Westwood drama. The morsel was turned over and over, and dressed up to suit a good many different palates. Lady Baintree's unfortunate position as hostess of the house in which the deplorable affair had occurred, as maker of the match disastrously terminated by the arrival on the scene of a more legitimate owner of the bridegroom, was much discussed. Commiseration was liberally expressed, comment exhaustively indulged in, descriptions of the ideal kind were not spared. Upon the night of the servants' ball, for instance, as the newly-returned couple appeared upon the scene, a veiled figure had, it was reported, glided from the centre of a crowd of guests, approached the Marchioness of Rotherholme, and pointing to the coronet which sparkled amidst the luxuriant tresses of her golden hair, had uttered these words, pronounced with a strong foreign accent, "*Why do you wear these jewels? They are mine!*" thus unveiled, and tableau. . . . With departures into the region of pure tragedy on the part of both wives, and *grandes effets de voix et des larmes*. Other paragraphists treated the situation from the humorous-cynical point of view; all made the most of it until a newer scandal of greater magnitude appeared on the social horizon.

Meanwhile Warr delayed his departure for Persia by ingenious excuses, living out the baking months of autumn in his Jermyn Street chambers. Buoyed by

one hope, inspired by one desire, acting with one motive in the effort to ascertain Elizabeth's whereabouts, to determine in what corner of the civilised globe his dethroned queen was hiding her crownless head, he spent time, of which he had a great deal to spare, and money, of which he had a very limited store at disposal. It was not until the first mists of October shrouded the trees of the London parks, and the lately shuttered and sheeted houses in the fashionable streets and squares began to come to life that the eagerly-sought item of information came to Warr through the medium of an indiscreetly-worded paragraph from the Riviera:—

“The beautiful Miss Colquhoun, who in the spring of last year made a splendid *début* in London society as the *fiancée* of the Marquess of Rotherholme, and crowned her triumph by leading that reformed *mauvais sujet* to the altar, has reappeared upon the Continent in her original character—that of an unmarried young lady of unbounded charms, but limited means, travelling under the protection of her father. It is an open secret that, upon the dissolution of the Marquess of Rotherholme's first marriage (a *decree nisi* having¹ been granted by the Right Hon. Sir William Woodbee, October 10th), negotiations for the re-establishment of matrimonial relations with the lady from whom he had been so brusquely sundered were renewed by the representatives of that nobleman, and definitely rejected, it is whispered, for the second time, by a young lady who, if the wisdom of her decision may be doubted, at least deserves praise for the courage of her convictions. A rumour has since reached here that his lordship is about to contract for the third

time a matrimonial alliance. The happy fair one is said to be the only daughter of Mr. Robert Tilling of Doncaster, for some years past Lord Rotherholme's trainer and stud-manager. Miss Polly—for the conquering vestal rejoices in the name made famous by the heroine of Dibdin's undying ballad—Miss Polly is said to be possessed of charms of the *agaçante* and *espiègle* order, and may be advised to *tenir bon*; so that if she does not actually gain the crown promised by the venerable Countess of history to her daughter, she may attain the less supreme distinction of wearing a coronet, not to mention the famous Norchester pearls, seven rows clasped by the famous white African brilliant found by a Kaffir labourer, one of the earliest employés at the opening of the Kimberley diamond mines in 18—."

The paragraph was dated from Cannes. Warr, as he packed the well-worn portmanteau pressed two years ago into service in the interest of Pope Dolimore and Charlotte, who had found, it had been rumoured, since her elopement, that her Turk, for all his English tastes and Parisian veneer, was a very badly-whitewashed kind of Oriental after all, dared not trust himself to think of the real purport of his action. His brain teemed with strange images like those that dance before the blotted vision of a fever-patient. His strong hand wavered and trembled, like the hand of a drunkard, as he tried, his task finished, to light his cigar. He was going—going to seek her—the woman who had cried out for help, and fled from the helper. Beyond that landmark of certainty lay forbidden country, across the border of which no rash hope might stray.

CHAPTER LIII

HILARY'S QUEST

THE good knight Palamedon, self-banished from the Court of Charlemagne during his wanderings in search of the Lady of the Hidden Bower, to whom he had previously offered his hand in marriage, and who, readers of the old romance of *Verardin* will remember, had been carried off and wedded by a Moorish Prince with a horse's head, the good knight Palamedon endured many grievous pains, braved many startling perils, and underwent many unpleasant enchantments before the grand and final battle with a dozen dragons which ended in victory for the lover, and the discovery—after the performance on his part of prodigies of valour, and the copious loss of blood—in the discovery of the Hidden Bower, which had been in the vicinity all the while, only veiled by a cloud, or a magic net, or one of the other countless machines in favour with the old romancists of the fifteenth century—from the eyes of the passionate seeker.

When Palamedon's beloved princess first escaped from the custody of her Moor, it is not recorded whether she sought the protection of her father, and whether that father was gratified at the sudden return upon his hands of a daughter for whose future he may have flattered himself *Destiny* had already handsomely provided.

The burden of Elizabeth's maintenance, as Captain

Colquhoun plaintively expressed it, having been removed from his shoulders, the bereaved parent had been enabled, as he put it, to lift up his head and look about him. He spoke in terms of fatherly affection of his son-in-law, who had responded generously indeed to a private appeal, worded with the eloquence that comes of long use. "Rotherholme," he said, "was a noble fellow. A young man who, if not entitled to a coronet by the mere accident of birth, would have still occupied a seat in Nature's House of Peers, by moral right and prescription." The possession of such a son-in-law was infinitely gratifying to the Captain. His paternal affection plumed itself, and his credit revived. He paid a few of his debts, and took occasion to contract a good many fresh ones with tailors and bootmakers who had previously spurned the idea of further credit.

His family were gracious. His elder brother, Lord Rederdall, acknowledged that, "after all, Grantly had not been such an idiot in his way of dealing with those girls." A wedding present of battered antique silver, dug from the recesses of some Georgian closet at the castle, had been sent to Elizabeth, and two of the younger "girls," Jane and Susan to wit, had officiated as bridesmaids on the occasion of the wedding. The small list of visitors assembled at the castle in August for such of the grouse-shooting as its owner reserved for himself and his friends, this year had included the name of Captain Colquhoun. He was now coddling his dandified elderly lungs in comfortable lodgings at Brighton, previous to taking flight for the Continent. Time had dealt gently with him, and his chest seemed even broader, his figure more up-

right, his grey-blue eye brighter, his scanty hair and heavy moustache more carefully scented, arranged and Hongroised than of yore. His landlady knew him well—had indeed been an old servant of the family, who had realised a modest competence and settled down as proprietress of a green-jaloused, white-painted lodging-house in the Old Steine, with a red-nosed, grey-headed, boot-blackening husband, who had once been a family butler. To her Captain Colquhoun was a link with the better days to which she continually referred, and, though not so prompt in payment as might be desired, as she admitted to intimate friends in moments of confidence, it was still gratifying to harbour one who was perennially a type of "the gentleman," such an appreciative judge of good cookery, and so regular in his habits. One of Captain Colquhoun's regular habits was a stroll before dinner, an easy-going, appetite-provoking daunder upon pier or promenade, enlivened by gossip with a crony, or mild flirtation with the crony's feminine relations, and soothed by a good cigar, and the leisurely perusal of an evening newspaper.

The issue of the particular day whose events we have to record was to acquaint the Captain with some family news, which was at the same moment intelligence of the most fashionable and exclusive kind. Friends quoted the paragraph which announced that upon the previous evening the Marquess and Marchioness of Rotherholme had joined the house-party at Westwood, and Captain Colquhoun assumed an air of dignified but modest importance, as he drooped his handsome profile, adorned with gold pince-nez of a youthful pattern, over the indicated column.

"I should have been there to greet my dear girl and her husband," he said with a sigh, and a little shrug, "but for this touch of gout."

"Charming woman Lady Baintree!" said one of the cronies, who had never met her.

"A *femme du monde* of the best type," rejoined Captain Colquhoun.

"Elegant house Westwood, so folks say," said a pretty American, who was married to the crony.

"Commodious," rejoined Captain Colquhoun lightly. He made no assertion; he was guilty of no vulgarity of untruthfulness. But his tone and air conveyed to his hearers that the splendours of Westwood had palled upon him from very familiarity.

"The Marquess and Marchioness had been staying at Doncaster, I believe?" hazarded somebody else.

"They have a place there," said the Captain. "A bachelor residence, where my son-in-law used to spend a good deal of his time. Unpretentious but comfortable," he had never seen the house, "and convenient for sporting reasons. But the stables—magnificent, I must own, both as regards appointments, capacity and management."

"You can get a mount, I daresay, fit to carry you?" the crony's crony remarked in a flattering disparaging tone.

The Captain shrugged his broad shoulders again.

"Oh! I am not badly used on the whole. My son-in-law does things *en prince*. I will say as much for him—say as much for him!"

He omitted to mention the fact that he had never spoken to that noble son-in-law, and that he was, by express stipulation, accompanied by a cheque, and the

hinted promise of others at recurrent periods, prohibited from seeking his acquaintance.

But the fib did no damage to anybody, and besides, a man is not obliged, the Captain told himself, to admit his casual acquaintances into the knowledge of his private affairs.

He finished his cigar and his stroll, drank several glasses of sherry and Angostura at the bar of the hotel, where the crony and his American bride were staying, and feeling slightly injured that the expected invitation to dinner had not been forthcoming, took his leisurely way back to his lodgings. He let himself in, and turned into the comfortable dining-room, which he rented, with its adjoining bed-chamber and nodded approvingly at the sight of the crackling fire in the bright steel grate—because the autumn evenings were chill, and he loved warmth and brightness. The lamp was not yet lighted, he noted with a frown. His slippers lay upon the hearthrug—the easy-chair gaped invitingly. He glanced at his own still handsome reflection in the chimney-glass, and caressed with his well-kept finger tips the red line that the pressure of his hat—a new one—had made upon the forehead many women besides his landlady had agreed with himself in considering a noble one. Then he rang the bell, and sat down in the easy-chair to wait until the obsequious landlord should appear, and relieve him of his boots. For a wonder the bell remained unanswered, and a sense of heaviness, dulness, rigor in the limbs that once had been so lithe and active, prevented the Captain from getting up to ring again. He leaned back, wondering stupidly at the torpor that seemed to hold and bind him as with chains of invisible lead,

in odd contrast to the clearness of his brain, which, he recognised with complacency, was extraordinarily awake and active. Odd memories of things done with, put away in Time's dusty coffers and forgotten, years before, came back to him just then. In imagination he was young again, moving through scenes remembered after long oblivion; in reality he was old and broken in the eyes that scanned his face as the light of the fire revealed its lines, and accentuated its hollows—eyes that dwelt on him with pleading, pathetic love and wistful entreaty. They were eyes that exactly resembled those of his dead wife, and oddly enough she was most present in Captain Colquhoun's mind at that moment, as he had seen her first at some hunt ball—a slight, brilliant, rose-cheeked young creature, dressed in a diaphanous cloud of muslin, with pearls about her white throat, and on the white bosom that her shining curls kissed when she bent her head. She had a little money, but he would have married her had she been penniless, by Jove! and a great many men would have been glad to do the same. Midge—why didn't they call her Marietta, like her mother?—resembled her exactly; Elizabeth too, but in a graver, larger, more solid style—a steel engraving of a miniature painted on ivory. Yes, they had married and been happy in spite of this, and that, and the other—no use to regret now. She had forgiven, and she was dead. Poor Marietta! Well! he had kept his word—been an excellent father to both the girls, done everything for them short of giving them another mother; he wondered why he had never married again in all these years? he who had captivated Continental widows and doubtful heiresses by dozens. Perhaps

now—now that he was getting older, he might—if a suitable companion—not too old, and again not too young, and further, not too poor, presented herself as willing to tread the final mazes of the dance of life with a still handsome and agreeable partner. The notion was not a bad one—he wondered why it had not occurred to him before. Fidelity to Marietta—dead Marietta—was certainly not the reason of his having continued to lead this widowed turtle kind of existence for years—how many? His brain, so clear otherwise, was strangely reluctant to aid him in the task of counting up the years. With an effort he turned his heavy head towards an almanac that hung upon the wall close beside the double doors that led into his bedroom, and with a thickening and chilling of the blood about his heart, saw—as it seemed to him—his dead wife standing on the threshold.

CHAPTER LIV

ELIZABETH BREAKS THE NEWS

"DO you not know me?" Elizabeth asked, in surprise at the blankness of his stare.

He tried to say "Marietta!"

"No, no!"

The tall, slight, white figure came and knelt by him and embraced him, and even his drowsy senses realised that the touch was that of a living woman.

"I think you must have been asleep and dreaming, dear. It is—" she said.

The Captain sat upright in his chair. "My dear Elizabeth—my dear girl!" He kissed her, and wondered why her cheek was wet. "A sudden surprise. You will forgive my stupidity. I had, as you suggest, been dozing. How did you come here? Where is your husband?"

She rose from her kneeling position at the question, and moved from him to the hearth, and seemed to warm one slender, arched foot in the glow of the cheerful red fire. Something in the gesture with which she held her dress aside, reminded him of her mother. He said again, "Where is Rotherholme?" and she answered, beating with one white hand upon the marble mantel-shelf:

"I will tell you presently."

"And I will ring for the lamp," her father said, and was stiffly rising to touch the bell when she stopped him, almost with a cry.

"Wait! I have—I have something to say—something to tell you first." And then she added, after a pause, "Ask me my name!"

"This is some joke!" her father said, after a second of disturbed conjecture as to whether his daughter could by any possibility have lost her wits. Even without the lamp he could detect now something unusual in her tone and manner—about her very dress, and he hated things unusual. They were disturbing, and disturbance of any kind, physical or mental, was excessively bad for a man with an Anglo-Indian liver.

"It is no joke," returned Elizabeth. She repeated with a hard persistency. "Ask me my name."

"The family surname is, I believe—" Captain Colquhoun was beginning, when his daughter cut him short. "If I possess any claim to a surname at all, it is yours, papa." There was a quiver in the voice. "I have come to you to-night to tell you so."

"My dear—" Captain Colquhoun began, with a sense that the disturbing element he dreaded had broken in upon his peace, and a lively dread of a scene impending, "this is some lover's quarrel with your husband."

Elizabeth laughed, and the sound made her father still more uncomfortable.

"I have no husband," she said; "that is the news I have come to tell you."

"You have left—Rotherholme?"

"No."

"He has—"

"To do him justice he has done nothing!" said Elizabeth.

"Then in Heaven's name—" began the distracted Captain.

"I called in the aid of Heaven when I married," said Elizabeth, with another of those mirthless laughs. "The invitation was a blasphemy. Father—my story lies in a nutshell, but there is enough of it, nevertheless, to make my daily bread bitter for all the future years God may make me live. I married out of greed and folly and ambition a creature as worthless, if one shade more honest than myself, in that he took me for myself, not for what I had. I had drained my cup of shame to the dregs, I thought, when another was held to my mouth last night. I have been—not this man's wife, but his mistress, ever since we stood at the altar hand in hand to seal our ugly bargain. He had a wife living—unknown to him—when he married me. There is no doubt!—what I state is fact, incontestably true. I have left him for ever to-day. And I have come to you to beg for the only refuge left me."

Her father sank heavily into his easy-chair, with a gurgling sound like a moan. "Disgrace," he said thickly, "disgrace. My daughter!—" and covered his face theatrically with his hands.

The clock ticked upon the mantel-shelf, and the cinders tinkled on the tiled hearth. Elizabeth stretched out one hand and touched her father's sleeve. He moved impatiently, and shook the hand off as a peevish child might have done.

"Don't touch me! This is too horrible. Just as I fancied you provided for in life—just as my own prospects seemed improving." He struck his forehead. "I will not consent to hear of such a thing. To admit

it would be madness. I will go to your husband—to Lord Rotherholme, and demand—”

“No,” said Elizabeth firmly. “He and I have done with each other for good. I admit,” her voice softened, “that this is a shock to you—that you have reason to be grieved and upset. I will try to remember that always. I am remembering it now. But be—” she caught her breath—“a little kind. Say that I may have my home with you for the present, until I know where to turn. After all I am not penniless. I have a little money that was my mother’s. I shall not be an expense.”

“I cannot contemplate such a possibility,” cried Captain Colquhoun. “Your story will be on every tongue—it will be canvassed in all the papers; I shall not be able to show my face in public for the shame of it. You—you must go away,” he pointed to the door, “to some quiet place, under another name, until I have decided what is best to be done. You—”

Elizabeth’s agony burst from her in a low cry.

“Papa!”

He was ashamed, and went on to make excuses. His position demanded the sacrifice of feeling, he tried to say, with a tongue grown strangely heavy, and in words that were oddly elusive and difficult to formulate. And then he tried to rise and open the door, as she groped at the handle, blinded by tears that had come at last, wrung forth by this new stroke of unkind destiny—the desertion of the father in whose love she had trusted. And then, as she turned with a last parting word upon her lips, he saw the sorrow of her face change to pity and alarm, heard her cry of terror, and knew, as he strove for utterance vainly,

with drawn distorted lips, that a powerful ally had stepped in to the aid of the outcast Elizabeth, and with one paralysing blow of the scythe had rendered him, until the day of his death, dependent on the protecting love of the daughter he had spurned.

CHAPTER LV.

ON THE TRACK

THE Riviera presented its usual appearance to the winter visitor. Cannes was but thinly populated, the tide of fashion setting steadily this season towards Mentone. A biting wind blew from the north-west, though the sun shone warm and bright, and the sky scarcely bore a cloud. Warr shivered as he alighted on the platform of the smart new station. There was a ghostly sense of revisitation—a recrudescence of painful sensation in those first moments. A mistral blew through the empty chambers of his heart, and mentally as well as physically he was cold.

He put up at an unobtrusive hotel near the station, a cheap commercial house, whose moderate charges and garlicky *cuisine* were expressly adapted to the purses and palates of the *commis voyageurs* who frequented it. Observant of the shabby Gladstone bag of many labels, and the bronzed features and unostentatiously plain clothing of her guest, the landlady of *Des Colonies* set him down in her womanly mind as an officer of the English Army, on half-pay possibly, poor to a certainty, but handsome and *de bon genre*. It occurred to her that he had been crossed in love or was a widower. The cruel fair, in the first case, must have been a monster without heart; in the second, madame must have been desolated to leave a husband so amiable.

Meanwhile, Warr, unconscious of observation, oblivious of comment, wandered to and fro amidst familiar scenes, treading ways not forgotten—a black speck upon the bright landscape—looking for a woman in a white dress. It was not the season for white. Tweeds of English manufacture and sternly neutral hue held pre-eminence; but none the less Elizabeth's image was continually projected upon Warr's mental field of vision, wearing the white serge with the filigree silver belt in which he had first seen her, that memorable day in the garden of the hotel *Des Etrangers*, under the blossom-laden boughs of almond and mimosa, breathing perfume under the kisses of the splendid sun. Days passed and came again, and found him still stubbornly prosecuting his search. He had no certain knowledge of Elizabeth's whereabouts, no definite plan of action. As he had wandered the streets of Vienna once, long ago, waiting for the answer to the letter that never reached her—the shabby, soiled letter that had returned so strangely to his hands—so he wandered now, ceaselessly, untiringly, though without any desperation of impatience—waiting, waiting, for some sign.

It came at last, as such signs do come, unexpectedly. It happened that one day, Warr, imitating the example of several other aimless strollers, had turned back in the wake of an open hearse, followed by a single hired conveyance, and so gained the western border of the belt of villas and bungalows which engirdles the Continental Bournemouth, beyond which is a little Protestant cemetery.

It is a pretty, prim little spot bounded with high white walls, adorned with carefully cultivated garden-

beds, and walks of coloured gravel, with its little Anglican chapel sitting in its centre, crowned with a brick belfry of disproportionate size. The small *cortège* rolled through the gates—the open hearse with its plain black coffin, bearing, in that land of flowers, only one wreath of violets—the shabby mourning brougham, the casual train of curious, or indifferent, or respectful lookers-on. The grave lay open, with the trestles beside it, and the ominous-looking coils of black cord. Warr lingered in the open until the short service in the chapel was ended, and the funeral train issued from the little west door: the clergyman in cassock, surplice and biretta, the coffin with its bearers, one woman's figure, in black garments and deeply veiled, bringing up the rear. . . . Something in the lithe movements, telling of perfect symmetry and grace—something in the carriage of the head, not haughtily upheld as of old but bent in sorrow, set Warr's heart leaping. He moved until he stood close to her, the bystanders giving him place. He lifted his hat and stepped forward, and stood beside the lonely figure in its sombre garments, not courting her notice with look or gesture, silently offering all he dared or might. He heard a stifled exclamation in the well-known voice, and then as the final passages of the burial service were read, and the long black coffin creaked down into its earthly bed, Elizabeth turned to him and said, with tears fast falling down her white cheeks:

“My father.”

CHAPTER LVI

AT LAST

ELIZABETH and Hilary Warr stood together beside the newly-filled grave in the Protestant cemetery. The last onlooker had drifted away; the hearse and brougham had driven off; the clergyman had retired to the vestry to change his surplice. The wind had fallen, and the sun shone warm; perfume breathed from the jonquils and narcissi and violets set in vases on many graves; a tall, white marble shaft made a background for Elizabeth's slight figure in its heavy mourning weeds; the hills made a solemn amphitheatre about them; the pines, rank above rank, looked down upon the last scene but one in the tragedy of these two lives.

Elizabeth spoke of her father.

"It was a stroke of paralysis," she said, "brought on by—by a shock. He had long been in uncertain health, though he told nobody of this; and when the moment came that he was called upon to bear a—a great disappointment," her lips quivered, "he gave way under the strain. When he rallied he had a fancy to come here—he should get quite strong, he said, out of England—grey skies and dismal streets always had a depressing effect upon him. So I brought him away. I feared my society was not good for him—the sight of me would be a continual reminder to him of what he had better not remember—but a nurse is an ex-

pense, and we—" she hesitated, "were never very well off. Besides, he seemed to wish to have me near him."

"That was only natural," said Warr, in a commonplace tone.

"I tried to divert him from dangerous topics, as the doctor advised," Elizabeth went on; "but I was not always successful. He never ceased to deplore what he thought my stubbornness—he continually urged me to take a step which he, poor dear!—and others thought would be for my good. I need not speak in parables to you. He—they wished me to return to Lord Rotherholme." Her white cheeks, her white throat were stained with a sudden rush of colour. "But that I could not do," she said, "not even to please my father."

Warr repeated mechanically: "That you could not do!"

"I have no blame for—him," said Elizabeth. Warr knew that she spoke of the man who had been her husband. "I hope he has no hard words for me. But when a woman has made a great mistake"—her voice sharpened almost into a cry—"when she has wandered in never-lifting darkness and never-ceasing pain, night and day, day and night, for weary months and months, tormented by the consciousness that her misery is of her own making, galled by the fetters she forged for herself, and a door opens in her dungeon wall, and her chains fall clanking to the ground, and she knows herself free to tread the green earth, and breathe untainted air again . . ." She broke off.

"I think I understand," said Warr. "I am sure that I understand."

"They wrote me no more letters after a while," said Elizabeth; "they appealed to my father. He thought it madness in me to refuse to be—'righted before the world,' he called it. I said I would not be wronged before myself. He wore his strength away with endless arguments. I fear the anxiety and the continued irritation hastened his end, though I tried to spare him in every way."

"You have nothing to reproach yourself with, of that I am certain," said Warr gently. "And I am afraid he—was not at all times considerate."

"He grew kinder to me before he died," rejoined Elizabeth, so changed an Elizabeth, in her mourning garments, with her meek, pale face. "He seemed to see things more clearly as his eyes grew more dim. Oh! he was very kind to me before he died. He could not articulate plainly, because the second seizure had affected his speech, but I knew what he meant. And when he lay so still at last, with such a look of youth upon his face, I realised what he must have been like when my mother loved him first." She dried her tears, and stooped and gathered a little grass from one of the newly-laid sods upon the grave. "For a keepsake," she said, "to carry with me when I go to-morrow."

"You go to-morrow?"

"I leave for Paris to-morrow afternoon by the five o'clock train." She moved from the grave. Warr followed her. They walked down the gravel path together.

"Might I ask," he began, struggling with an overwhelming sense of coming loss and deprivation, "what your plans are—if you have any—for the future?"

"I am going," Elizabeth answered after a pause, "to a friend—an old governess—who lives in Paris. I have a little money. She will let me live with her until I, too, find employment as a teacher of English. The circumstances of my past would—so I have been told—prevent my obtaining a situation in the house of any respectable person, in England, once my story became known. Continental people are, fortunately for me, less particular."

Her smile was an arrow in Warr's heart. When he spoke again it was with effort.

"Why should you turn governess?"

"Because," returned Elizabeth, "it is necessary that I should earn my living. All that my father left must go to Midge. It is not much—a sum in Consols, bringing in about two hundred and fifty pounds a year. Our uncle, Lord Rederdall, will act as her guardian until she is of age. He has written to say so, and I—"

"You are going out into the world to fight poverty alone," said Warr. "You are not fit for such a struggle, even if you were not—"

"I am young still," said Elizabeth bravely.

He almost laughed.

"You are too young," he said, "and too—beautiful for such a life. I cannot bear to think of it for you, that you should be burdened with drudging toils, self-condemned to a life of monotonous emptiness, subjected to vulgar patronage, perhaps to coarse insult," he answered, and ground his teeth. "Let me help you. Why will you not let me help you, Elizabeth?" he cried. "For your first trouble you turned to me. I have the letter here—a sheet of paper with one word

written upon it, *'Help!'* I dreamt the night before it came that I heard your voice crying that one word. Twice I awakened with it ringing in my ears, and when the morning broke I found that I had, as the children say, dreamed true."

She had been very pale, but as he turned to her a royal rose bloomed in each of her fair cheeks, and her grey eyes shone through tears.

"Wait," she said, putting out her gloved hand, "I want to explain—I must tell you how that sheet of paper reached you. I had suffered a terrible shock. . . . I went to bed, and tried to sleep. In my sleep I thought that I rose from the bed, went to the writing-table, scrawled that one word, and thrust it into an envelope directed to your club. . . . You had said, 'A line to the Travellers' will always find me.' In the morning I learned from my maid that what I thought I had dreamed had really taken place, and that she had posted the letter. It was too late to recall."

"Would you have recalled it if it had been possible?" asked Warr.

Elizabeth did not answer. The bright colour had not yet burnt itself out of her sweet white cheeks. Her head drooped a little as she walked. Warr envied the turf that knew the pressure of her light footsteps, the gravel brushed by the hem of her black gown, the tuft of earthy grass that she had wrapped in her filmy scrap of handkerchief, and thrust into the bosom of her gown. The new Elizabeth, draped in black, slower in step, paler of cheek, with the faint lines of sorrow on her smooth brow, and the threads of silver already showing in her dead-leaf hair, bore for him even a more potent charm than the splendid young

Atalanta of the bygone years. And there was now—wonderful thought! no barrier between them of any man's making, or any woman's, if her own unresponsive heart did not close its gates to the knocking of Love's eager hands.

As by common consent they spoke of things that mattered little as they paced, side by side, back to Elizabeth's lodgings. Two spinster sisters of Scotch descent were her landladies. They had been very good to her, she said, and had helped to nurse Captain Colquhoun in his last illness as though the sick man had been their own blood kin. Warr bestowed a mental benediction upon the good old ladies. They had helped Elizabeth to bear some portion of her burden, that burden which he would have so gladly taken upon his own shoulders for the rest of his natural life. But a seal was set upon his lips, the seal of the grave by which they had stood together. He would speak to-morrow.

They reached the little villa where Captain Colquhoun had spent his last days on earth, and Warr took the hand Elizabeth held out to him, and stood bare-headed a moment, looking into the beautiful sad face. There was a new bravery in it and a new resolve.

"I—have not thanked you," she said. "I meant to; but there are things easy to feel and difficult to say. I felt very lonely and very sad to-day, standing by *his* grave-side, and then I looked up and saw the face of a friend whom I thought far away. You have been very kind. Good-bye."

"To meet again!" said Warr eagerly.

"I am going away to-morrow," said Elizabeth, with a degree of coldness in her manner.

"But by a late train," pleaded Warr, not so much by the urgency of his voice as by the entreaty in his hazel eyes. "We might have one more walk together, for the sake of old times?"

She yielded.

"Why not?" she said, as if to herself, and Hilary Warr echoed, "Why not?"

He went back to his hotel. There was no sleep for him that night—the whitest night of his life. He lay broad awake, watching for the first faint streaks of dawn to outline the drawn-down blinds and herald the desired morrow. They came, and he could lie no longer, but rose and bathed and dressed, and with the first stirrings in the house below went down and out of the door a sleepy waiter had just unbarred with much accompaniment of rattling chains, and went out into the chill bright morning.

He found himself at the gates of the cemetery after an hour of aimless tramping. The sacred spot of ground, so recently hallowed by *her* footsteps, lay green and trimly neat behind its locked white gates. An elderly gardener potted about amongst the graves; birds were twittering amongst the shrubs; the flowers lifted newly-washed faces to the bright sky. "I should like to lie here," thought Warr, "when my life-sands have run." But life appealed to him, on the whole, as a good thing on that particular morning, and he was hungry when he turned from the white gates. A little green-painted shanty, dotted down in a neat garden enclosure by the roadside, and presided over by a clean old woman in a frilled cap and clattering sabots, supplied the wanderer with coffee, fresh eggs and pistols. Refreshed, he glanced at his watch.

Is it too early for his intended visit? The hands indicated ten. Warr must in the very name of decency stifle impatience for at least two hours more. He went for another walk, directing his steps with attention towards a well-remembered spot. Ascending his amidst fresh-liveried woods brought him to his destination. The grove of ilex had not been cut down, the rude stone bench was still there beside the sparkling spring, the tufts of trembling fern; the clumps of narcissi and cyclamen were not yet in bloom the places whence the warmth of the spring should come to them once more. Warr took off his hat and sat down upon the bench, leaned back against the cliff, and closed his eyes and fell into a morning dream, as the sun climbed high in the heavens.

A shadow fell across his face; the sound of a footstep roused him from his musings, and the lady of his dream, crowned queen of all living women in this one man's heart, stood before him. Some subtly-linked reminiscence of memory had drawn Elizabeth to the spot, and the sight of Warr already there she flushed and startled. He came forward with a greeting which sounded commonplace, and she replied with chill formality. But they sat down side by side upon the bench, and then neither the man nor the woman had a word to say. Elizabeth looked straight before her upon the changeless sea, Warr gazed undisguisedly upon her face, and could not take his eyes from it. The letter he had written her from Vienna, after their parting—the letter which had never reached her way in his notecase. He had promised himself that he would give her the letter—place it in her hands,

and without betraying Midge's unchildish treachery, yet tell her that it had miscarried, and entreat her to read and answer it—he had the words upon his tongue's end, yet they were never spoken. For at the meeting of their eyes, when Elizabeth turned her face to his, and at the meeting of their hands, which moved irresistibly together, and clasped as though they never could unclasp again, mere words were rendered useless. The revelation was never made. After a few moments, indeed, Elizabeth asked rather irrelevantly:

“Do you return to Persia soon?”

And Warr answered, “Yes.”

Something fluttered in the white throat near him. The long brown lashes drooped over the grave grey eyes.

“A long journey!” whispered Elizabeth.

“But not a lonely one,” said Warr, “if my wife goes with me. Oh, Elizabeth, Elizabeth, say that she will!”

And on the lips that met his own he found no bitterness of denial.

THE END

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